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**THIRD PARTY INTERVENTION INTO WORKPLACE
BULLYING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

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University of Glamorgan Prifysgol Morgannwg for the degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

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Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Date _____

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Statement 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Abstract

Research into interventions in workplace bullying appears to be largely under researched despite widespread acceptance that action is required. Many studies exist that have explored what needs to occur to deal with workplace bullying. It is apparent however that there is a general struggle over what people should actually do, making the absence of intervention studies somewhat puzzling. This thesis studies a microcosm of what interventions may take place through a national helpline run by Acas, a UK based Government funded organisation with a remit to help resolve workplace relations conflicts.

Adopting a framework of social construction, this thesis, using interviews and focus groups, has sought to answer the question, "What role does the Acas helpline fulfil when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying?"

This thesis finds a relatively uniform response from participants which shows a lack of clarity of understanding as to what bullying at work means. Participants also demonstrate the impossible task of providing a singular route to intervention because of the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. Similarly, the capacity for interventions to provide solutions that satisfy the callers' expectations falls somewhat short of what was hoped for. This is not a failing of Acas as an organisation. Rather, it illustrates the complexity of providing interventions for complex subjective situations, such as workplace bullying, using a telephone helpline.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter Overview

This thesis is a study into the phenomenon of workplace bullying with a particular focus upon the role that third parties play in providing a support service and reactive intervention stimulated by people who have been or are subjects of bullying in their workplace. In the last 10-15 years, there has been an increasing interest from academic commentators in the UK, Scandinavia, mainland Europe, Australia, and the USA into the phenomenon probably most commonly known as workplace bullying. A significant element of the literature has largely been focused upon the causes and consequences of workplace bullying. There appears to have been little, if any, research carried out in the field of workplace bullying that studies the role of third party intervention.

Some organisations appear to have become aware of the negative effects that bullying has in the workplace and increasingly, it is now becoming apparent that those organisations are augmenting their policies in an attempt to mitigate the risks of occurrences of workplace bullying and eradicate them when they do occur (for example see Rayner and McIvor, 2006). Possibly one of the reasons some organisations have acted in the way described is due to recent legal provisions, such as the race, sex and age discrimination acts, which now afford employees greater protection in the workplace than has previously been the case. Proactive intervention has been identified as an important contribution in the prevention of workplace bullying, (Hoel and Giga, 2006). This thesis will investigate a role that a third party plays in reactively intervening after bullying has alleged to have occurred in the workplace in order to understand the role the external intervening organisation plays in the workplace bullying discourse.

This positioning statement aims to provide the reader with an early, informative, and stimulating signpost in an attempt to create a focal point of reference. This intent by the author has been made for three specific reasons. First, the concept of bullying seems to be an emotive one that may ignite thoughts of dysfunctional school playgrounds characterised and polarised by dominant and distressed vulnerable children. Workplace bullying may possess some similarities to the

phenomenon of bullying of children in schools, for example, where a power differential exists between the target and perpetrator, (see Einarsen et al, 2003 and Olweus, 2003 for examples). However, there is a common acceptance in the contemporary body of literature (for example Saunders et al, 2007; Ayoko et al, 2003 and Baron and Neuman, 1996) that workplace bullying is more covert, subtle and psychological in the way in which the phenomenon is made real and inflicted upon the subjects.

Second, many people are likely to be able to relate to adult bullies who they have met, known, worked with, or who may be within their social circle or family. It is likely that these adult bullies are undesirable acquaintances or symbols with which people would not wish to be associated or likened to because of the labelling attributed to them of being a bully. Regardless of the origin of the research, contemporary literature on bullying appears universally to conclude that the phenomenon of workplace bullying is wholly negative in its action and consequences to all parties concerned.

Third, the realities constructed by the reader arising from their personal experiences and representations about bullies and bullying are important influences that may have some bearing on the way in which this thesis is read and interpreted. It is considered important to recognise the multiple interpretations, realities and constructs of bullying that may exist in the reader's mind. Labelling of bullies and self labelling of having been bullied have been identified in previous research as being important elements of the construct, definition, interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon which is referred to here as workplace bullying (see Lewis 2002 and Saunders et al 2007 for examples).

Boundaries of this Thesis

It is important at the outset of a doctoral thesis to frame the boundaries of the research, (Dunleavy 2003, p.19). In setting out this thesis, the deliberations over the boundaries appeared to be an arduous exercise for two reasons. First, the definition of workplace bullying partially remains shrouded in some disagreement. Opinions vary between academics and industry professionals, such as advisory groups (for example see Saunders et al, 2007; The Report of the

Expert Advisory Group on Workplace Bullying, 2005; and Porteous, 2002). The media have seized opportunities to promulgate a version of workplace bullying that sometimes exudes a sensationalist approach (for example, The Glasgow Herald, 27th September, 2008, p.3, The Evening Standard, 12th September, 2008, p.14, Western Mail, 7th June, 2007, p.31, Leicester Mercury, 10th July, 2007, The Guardian, June 19th 2006, p.2, The Mail on Sunday, 26th Feb 2006, p.39). This thesis uses scholarly reference to define and interpret workplace bullying, whilst recognising, acknowledging and appreciating the contribution from other sources that serve to enhance the richness of the workplace bullying discourses.

Second, the requirement for original and significant contribution requires the author to recognise the broader research subject peripheral to the area of study, which may contain information that supplements the contribution to knowledge being made. This requires discipline (Dunleavy, 2003) to ensure that the context of what is included in the thesis is relevant and can be explained and justified as such. Further Dunleavy counsels that the inclusion of any information should serve to assist the reader in understanding the author's philosophical position (for example, the labelling and positioning of theories and previous research in respect to the author's own views). This thesis aims to engender expectations in the reader throughout the work by taking a thorough and in depth approach, sometimes going against the prevailing intellectual current of the workplace bullying schools of research. A parallel co-existent aim exists to ensure that the reader is exposed to information and material that adjoins the core research requirements, but is not overly distracted by these requirements. This thesis will highlight and draw to the reader's attention subject matter that is considered relevant but not critical to the thesis. This information will be succinctly explained, but not critically investigated.

Workplace Bullying: an overview explanation

The phenomenon of bullying is well known to most people who have experienced school. The stereotypical image of the school bully may conjure up many attributes, such as a larger male child, who maybe has a following of peers, or who exhibits aggressive or humiliating behaviour towards others. The school playground bully may be someone who relies on coercion or threats of violence or

even violence itself to ensure he or she gets their own way and that the subject of their behaviour remains in a disadvantaged and possibly powerless position to respond. This portrayal of a school bully may not necessarily be applicable in understanding workplace bullying. Workplace bullying has, for example, been characterised as an extreme social stressor (Zapf, 1999), a physical illness (Salin, 2003), and a source of invalidism and trauma (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2001). It is important at this early juncture to note that the focus is wholly upon workplace bullying although there is evidence in the literature and other places, such as the media, to suggest that workplace bullying is influenced in a theoretical and practical way by the well established debate surrounding the bullying of children in schools.

Bullying in organisations is not considered a new phenomenon; many industries and careers are steeped with so called traditions that could be considered bullying. For example, military and paramilitary organisations exude cultures that thrive on dominant behaviours in a structured power hierarchy resulting in an environment that provides a breeding ground that has been alleged to possibly be an antecedent to workplace bullying, (for example, Archer 1999). Historically craft apprenticeships have been characterised as a rite of passage for young men and women, during which they are often subject to treatment at the hands of more senior colleagues that may be considered by some to be humiliating. In a more subtle way, trades unions' officials may be viewed by management as being threatening in what may be considered a power based relationship (see for example Heery 2006). The understanding of what bullying in the workplace (and to an extent in schools) means in terms of academic research, however, is relatively new.

The first research into workplace bullying seems to have emanated from Scandinavia. The late Professor Heinz Leymann, a Swedish medical practitioner, pioneered the research debate into bullying at work. Leymann's earliest work, (for example Leymann and Gustafsson, 1984) drew heavily on the existing schools bullying debate and seems to have been prompted by the Swedish Work Environment Act dating from 1976 which afforded protection to workers' rights to remain physically and mentally healthy at work (Leymann 1990; Einarsen and

Skogstad 1996). Much of Leymann's early work and that of some of the other Scandinavian commentators was unfortunately not published in English. Later, Leymann's work in the field of workplace bullying was published in English, including some of his more notable work that may be regarded as seminal in the workplace bullying field. For example, Leymann's (1996) paper introducing bullying at work. Leymann also seemed to be a catalyst for other Scandinavian academic commentators such as Einarsen and Raknes (1997), Einarsen and Skogstad (1996), Vartia (1996), and Einarsen, Raknes and Matthiesen, (1994). Other continental European commentators also emerged at around the same time, for example, in Germany and Austria, Groeblichhoff and Becker (1996), Niedl (1996), Resch and Schubinski (1996) and Zapf, Knorz and Kulla (1996), although with the possible exception of Zapf, most appear to have left the field. Notably, those writing in English as a second language used the word 'mobbing' rather than bullying. It is evident from the literature that the use of terminology was originally a conscious decision by Leymann, (1996). Leymann believed that the word bullying was synonymous with physical aggression and seemingly concluded that 'bullying' and 'mobbing' had sufficiently different characteristics and were not interchangeable terms. It seems apparent that even at this early juncture, the discourse of language and the challenges presented by multiple commentators publishing in different languages was potentially problematic because of what appears to be a very subjective and interpretive construct for subjects of workplace bullying, onlookers and those developing policy in the organisational or legislative setting.

In the United Kingdom one of the earliest commentators was Charlotte Rayner (1995) who provided a conference paper on workplace bullying. Rayner continued to publish in the late 1990s along with authors such as Hoel et al (1999), Liefvooghe and Olafsson (1999) and Lewis (1998). In Australia, the workplace bullying debate had also developed through the contributions of, for example, McCarthy, Sheehan and Kearns, (1995), McCarthy, et al, (1998) and Sheehan (1999). The debate in the USA was emerging, having been stimulated as long ago as 1976 when Brodsky wrote of workplace harassment. Research in the USA and North America specifically on workplace bullying appeared to develop from Keashley et al (1994) whose paper discussed workplace hostility. Neuman

and Baron (1997) writing in Giacalone and Greenberg (1997) spoke of the presence of workplace aggression, whilst Keashley (1998) used the term 'emotional abuse'. Andersson and Pearson (1999) writing in the eminent Academy of Management Review referred to challenges presented when confronted with 'workplace incivility'.

It is apparent from this review of early research into workplace bullying that a common term was not being used consistently across the research debate. Were all the researchers cited above referring to the same phenomenon? Were cultural and societal differences resulting in various manifestations within the workplace bullying genre? These questions may be typical and characteristic of an emerging research debate. Nonetheless, the challenge of the language used by researchers has been an obstacle and it may be argued that commentators are yet to fully appreciate the implications in a number of contexts, such as definition, choice of words, and the choice of interpretation. Indeed, this obstacle should not be viewed as a burden to the researcher. Rather, the interpretive natures of language, the differing realities constructed by actors, and the multiple discourses that effect and are affected by the phenomenon of workplace bullying serve to enrich the debate as researchers and practitioners alike wrestle with the impact of workplace bullying.

Since the early research of the 1990s, there has been some convergence in the terms used to describe the phenomenon of workplace bullying. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that uniformity of language is probably an unrealistic utopia in this particular research field and may never be accomplished. This is because the myriad contributions from many sources and the increasing emphasis in the media, organisational and legal fields suggest that interpretation and definition may only be outwardly confirmed by case precedent and statutory instruments of law. Keashley and Jagatic (2003) provide a useful summary of definitions for what they refer to as hostile workplace behaviours. It is important to note that this summary does not only provide a list of definitions, but also a list of the words used to specify that which is being defined. For example, Keashley and Jagatic (2003) cite a number of terms that may all be classified as workplace bullying, but all have different names, for example, workplace deviance, generalised workplace

abuse, or GWA, and abusive supervision. Each one of these terms is defined in a different way. Just as there are similarities and areas of commonality, there also are distinct differences. Are these differences meaningful in the academic debate? It may be considered that they are not and upon scholarly examination, it may be determined that the same phenomenon is being studied. However, it is important to relate the definition and meaning of it to the people who may have been subjected to workplace bullying. The self labelling and labelling of the constructs described by Keashley and Jagatic (2003) therefore should not necessarily be assumed to be terms that can easily be transposed as the reality experienced by the people who have experienced workplace bullying. Those realities may be quite different.

There is clearly an equally contentious debate over a singularly agreed definition for workplace bullying (see for example Saunders et al 2007). If it is accepted that the academic debate around this subject has been in existence for 15-20 years, this absence of an agreed definition may be seen by some to be a convenience. This 'convenience' of constant debate, discussion and tautological exploration around words and their meaning is a disruption for others struggling to grasp a solution for everyday workplace challenges.

Defining Workplace Bullying

The definition of workplace bullying has been a matter of some discussion within the research field since the inception of the research debate approximately 10-15 years ago. The academic and theoretical detail of the definition(s) of workplace bullying will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. It is important at this juncture for the reader to appreciate the juxtaposed challenges faced by academic commentators surrounding the words used to express and describe workplace bullying whilst simultaneously attempting to define the same words with some consistency and common meaning. This challenge is inherent in the discourses of workplace bullying; there seems to be a subtle conflict in the terms and language used by, and between, researchers. For example Keashley and Jagatic (2003) tabulate different behavioural categories using examples to illustrate the dissimilar features that may be apparent in what seems to be defined as a single common phenomenon, but is apparently interpreted in significantly different ways by lay

persons and expert commentators alike. Such dissimilarity further emphasises the subjective and interpretive nature of the subject and, this thesis argues, characterises the richness of the multiple realities intrinsically set within the discourse and the research.

Hypothetically, supposing that the academic community were able to agree a definition; such agreement may be of limited use outside academia. This is because the definition and language discourse has also been contributed to by quasi academic and non academic bodies and actors as the workplace bullying phenomenon has evolved. For example, the trade union movement in the UK mobilised its efforts in reporting and investigating workplace bullying as long ago as 1996 where the National Association of School Masters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) published what they referred to as a 'hard hitting report' titled "No Place to Hide: Confronting Workplace Bullies" (NASUWT 1996). The aim of this report was to expose what the union believed was inappropriate behaviour that they alleged was being displayed by teachers in management positions in schools targeting classroom rank and file colleagues.

Also in 1996, The MSF union, (a UK trade union for skilled and professional people now amalgamated with Amicus), in championing the Dignity at Work bill, promoted to its membership the Campaign Against Bullying at Work. This informative publication aimed to highlight the negative aspects of bullying at work and expose the relationship of bullying behaviours with the then proposed Dignity at Work bill that was eventually proposed in the House of Lords in 2001 by Baroness Gibson of Market Rasen, having failed passage in the House of Commons in 1997. Most recently, Michael Gibbons (2007) responded to a request from the Secretary of State for Department of Trade and Industry to review employment dispute resolution in the UK, resulting in a broad range of recommendations that may be useful to this thesis.

Alongside the investigations being made by such bodies as trades unions, professional organisations began issuing guidelines and policy documents. For example, the Royal College of Nursing, (RCN) first published such a document in 1997 and have twice since updated it, most recently in 2005, illustrating the

evolving understanding that is being developed in industry communities. The evolution of understanding and emergence of a best practice debate has also been informed by organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). They have produced policy and research documents about workplace bullying, and latterly conflict management in the workplace, in 1996 and 2007 respectively. Aimed at human resource professionals, it is reasonable to assume that such publications as these contribute to providing the employer response to those publications produced by trades unions. The purpose of, and role that, such written campaigns, publications, and policy documents play will not be further investigated in this thesis. It is important to note however, in the context of this thesis, that one particular intent of publishing them may be to stimulate intervention in bullying; an intervention to prevent incidents occurring, to tackle the issues arising if incidents have taken place, and possibly to mobilise popular support in making workplace bullying an unacceptable social phenomenon. Numerous trade union and professional body organisations refer and signpost their membership to several other third party bodies, such as Acas, when providing advice on workplace bullying. This could imply that some organisations perceive Acas as a reliable and professional source of information who are able to support its customers when they may be subjected to workplace bullying.

Bullying and the Law in the United Kingdom

The Government's and legislature's role in intervening in the workplace bullying discourse has also been significant over the past 10 years, especially in the UK. The rationale for including the law and its implications for workplace bullying within this thesis is that the law is in itself a form of intervention. For many working in UK organisations, legal redress is the ultimate intervention when all others may have failed. There are a significant number of laws, which may, or already have been, tested in criminal and civil courts, in cases of workplace bullying. These include the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974; the Employment Law Act 1996, 1999; the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the Human Rights Act 1998. There are numerous examples of case law where the appellant case has been upheld in situations that are referred to as workplace bullying in the accompanying narrative. These cases however, have been brought

to the courts as cases of discrimination, unfair or constructive dismissal, harassment, failure of duty of care, and injury to feelings. It appears that there is sufficient legal provision to seek justice in cases of workplace bullying (Porteous 2002). Equally however, it is apparent that the subjective nature of the phenomenon known as workplace bullying means that defining it in terms that can be framed in legal parlance may not yet be feasible and reliable.

Any perceived ambiguity in the United Kingdom, however, has not prevented a significant number of cases reaching court. At a workplace bullying conference in London in November 2006, Anthony Morton-Hooper of Mishcon de Reya solicitors presented compelling evidence in 20 cases including combined appeals where cases of workplace bullying were evident and the courts had ruled in the appellants' favour (Morton-Hooper 2006). The financial settlements in cases of workplace bullying have attracted headlines also, most notably in the cases of so called 'Superwoman' Nicola Horlick vs. Morgan Grenfell in 1997 and latterly in 2006 Helen Green vs. Deutsche Bank, in cases that were brought upon sex discrimination grounds, but were popularly described also as workplace bullying and harassment. (For examples, see The Times, 25th January, 1997 and The Independent, 27th April, 2006). Green was awarded £800,000 and Horlick's settlement, whilst confidential, was reported in the media as being 'generous'. It is not only high profile, high earning city employees who have succeeded in bringing proceedings against their employers in cases of workplace bullying. For example, in 2004, Diane Bradford, a primary school teacher won an out of court settlement for £200,000 after she had been bullied by school governors. The media attention that such cases attract is evident in today's sensationalist tabloid news and maybe to a lesser extent, TV broadcast media. It is possible that the stimulation generated by the media portrayal of workplace bullying could amplify the extent to which people label themselves or others in the social constructions they create.

Workplace Bullying and the Media

An extensive and detailed structured search using numerous academic search engines suggests that in the past 2 years alone, over 450 articles relating to workplace bullying have been reported in national newspapers alone. Notably,

using the same search criteria, between 1992 and 2000, 439 articles were published. This equates to a four fold increase in the frequency of reporting articles about workplace bullying. In 2008 alone, there were a reported 387 articles to 5th October. Reviewing these articles as part of this research, a number of questions become apparent: what is driving the media attention in workplace bullying? Are cases of workplace bullying increasing or is only the reporting in the printed press increasing? It is important to understand the role that the media plays in the workplace bullying discourse to address these questions. This is for two reasons. First, it seems possible that one of the contributors to the increasing media interest is the liability of employers and the financial gains that may be made by subjects of workplace bullying when cases are brought to court and attract the media spotlight. For example, at the time of writing this thesis, a case brought by a female banker in Canada is in progress with a potential pay out estimated at £600M predicated upon bullying, harassment, and sex discrimination. In New York, the same case is being used in a class action for 500 women, which is estimated to be worth over \$1BnUS. These legal actions are being promulgated and promoted in North America by such organisations as the Workplace Bullying Institute.

Second, it is feasible that the increased media coverage of workplace bullying acts as a kind of catalyst for people whose experiences in the workplace may resonate with what they read, hear or watch in the media. Previous conversations with friends and family may result in their experiences and those portrayed in the media being recounted to them by people who have seen such coverage.

The role of the so called moral entrepreneur (Becker, 1963) is also important to note in understanding the increase in media interest. The media may be used as a conduit for some commentators eager to promote their own interest groups. Whilst the accuracy of their claims is not being judged here, it seems likely that in today's society, column inches may be better filled with an emphasis of some element of sensationalism to which the reader may be able to relate. As recently as June 2008, printed, TV and internet media provided coverage of the University and College Union in the UK balloting members over industrial action following 'collective grievance' assertions that allegations regarding workplace bullying

went unaddressed by managers. Einarsen et al (2003) draw upon Lewis (2001) citing the case for questioning if the alleged rise in reported cases of workplace bullying may be attributed to 'moral panic'. Einarsen et al's assertion is that the media and action groups adopt a self righteous stance following inflated headlines that provokes a 'disaster mentality' where 'folk devils' prevail (Lewis 2001).

The media's ability to communicate information has undoubtedly been influenced since the advent of the Internet. It is apparent from using popular non-academic search engines that like most other subjects, there is a plethora of information and websites on workplace bullying. There are websites provided by independent groups which aim to promote awareness, support, and knowledge to targets of workplace bullying in a general manner, that is, their target audience is anyone who may have been bullied at work. Other websites target particular audiences and groups. There are also websites that are part of structured government online support strategies designed to provide appropriate information on a range of subjects. Finally, it is apparent that the academic community is diversifying its research activities to provide links to industry and other interested parties, such as the medical profession. The table at Appendix A details the websites examined by the author that relate to workplace bullying.

Appendix A aims to provide the reader with an insight to the information readily available on the Internet. There are relevant and important points to appreciate in this aim. First, the Internet is providing a relatively new, highly effective means to communicate to a global audience that has hitherto been impractical to achieve. Second, the tailoring of the message to various audiences is now being made very specific to accommodate niche interests and create highly specialised social networks (Schultz 2007). Third, the means of accessing multiple sources of tailored information has become increasingly simple and convenient in recent years because of highly sophisticated search engines, broadband internet connectivity in many homes and workplaces and in municipal or private internet cafes. Fourth, the proliferation of information via the internet is creating a greater level of subjective expertise and word of mouth/word of web information sharing (Wojnicki 2006). Whether this phenomenon, which has been widely studied in the context of consumer to consumer marketing, fuels the spirit of the

moral entrepreneur is unknown and not a matter that falls within the boundaries of this thesis. The point of relevance here, however, is that a greater level of information may lead to a greater likelihood for the potential for an intervention taking place.

The UK Office of National Statistics, (Pollard, 2007) report that 61% of homes in the UK have internet access and that 50% of people will have used the internet to search for information they believe to be unavailable or not easily available elsewhere. There is no empirical conclusion made or claimed in this thesis from these statements. It does suggest, however, that the interest in workplace bullying may have increased because of information available from the internet. The accessing of information from the internet may also result in an intervention episode catalysed by the website found by the person searching. It is important not to confine this line of examination into the internet as a source of information only to the target of what may be a workplace bullying episode(s). The person searching the internet may not be the target of bullying.

Lewis (2002) comments that family and friends and social networks in general help construct the image and reality of workplace bullying for the target and the target's social network. The internet sources of information may also provide a means for targets of workplace bullying and their social networks to attribute labels to themselves in the discourses they experience as part of a workplace bullying paradigm. The role of family, friends, and work colleagues may be an important component in how the intervention process may develop. The involvement and engagement of the social network surrounding the subject of the bullying episode is in itself a reactionary intervention, which may be catalysed by the subject or the member of the social network. Whilst intervention will be discussed in detail in Chapters four and five, it is important to contextualise the notion of intervention in the setting of this thesis.

Intervention – An overview

The notion of intervention is an important one for the reader to appreciate at this early stage of the thesis. This is because the term seems to have many different meanings that need to be sifted in order to reach a position that is commensurate

with the requirements of this thesis. Intervention is a relatively commonly held term in medical and legal parlance. Whilst a significant amount of the literature on intervention focuses on these contexts, the interpretation of the term in this way is of little benefit to this thesis. This is because the word has specific meaning in these professional and scholarly fields.

The notion of intervention becomes apparent in organisational literature when discussing such matters as organisational or transformational change. Research in this field may be of some use in terms of referring to meaning, however, a fundamental shortcoming in its application is that the intervention seems to invariably be by the organisation on the organisation. This positivistic notion that organisations can in some way intervene is one that is probably not harmonious with this research's philosophical tradition and approach and as such, this thesis will adopt caution over its applicability in this study.

In order to create a relevant and credible presentation for intervention, the integration of the individual, that is a person, rather than an inanimate object such as an organisation, needs to be introduced into the debate. This concept sees the convergence of intervention theory together with identity theory and relationship theory. This triangulation of theories aims to address the central tenet of this thesis, which is to understand the role Acas plays when intervening in cases of workplace bullying.

The applicability of the phenomenon of intervention contextualised against a landscape of identity theory and relationship theory can be situated in the field of workplace bullying. It is apparent that intervention in workplace bullying takes place in a number of ways. For example, trades unions will represent a member and intervene through formal and informal organisational processes, using collective and individualised relationships, through such routes as grievance procedures. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) also provide a reactive intervention opportunity to which employees may choose to turn. Employee assistance programs generally consist of telephone based helplines provided to organisations by an external supplier specialising in such areas as counselling and occupational health. EAPs are likely to only function in a dyadic relationship

between individual client (an employee of the company contracting the EAP service) and supplier (the EAP provider), usually confidentially where the employer does not have a direct relationship with the other two parties. Interestingly, however, many of these scenarios are not researched as interventions. In the case of trades unions, their historical legacy of providing moral justice to workers still seems to prevail in the way in which they are often represented. In the case of EAPs, the research focus appears to be that of organisational effectiveness, occupational health, and employee wellbeing.

There are also organisations that have established themselves in the voluntary sector in what may be described as 'single issue' self help groups that have a direct focus on workplace bullying. These offer a type of reactive intervention for people who contact them with advice and some form of signposting, although it seems possible from their promotional communication on the Internet that their positioning may be somewhat biased. This is not intended to be a critical observation, rather that the context of the intervention may be compromised in the way that relationship theory, identity theory and intervention theory interact within the discourses of the bullying or communication episode. Such an outcome may have consequences for the person contacting the organisation that may reinforce the perception of bullying or result in the construction of a reality for the individual that may have been stimulated by the organisation they have contacted.

The investigations into intervention in chapter 3 will illustrate the discipline required to remain within the boundaries of the thesis that have been defined in this chapter. The peripheral theories that require assimilation into the study and theory of intervention are important and require careful analysis. The role of organisations providing intervention into cases of workplace bullying also need to be contrasted with Acas to be able to understand accurately the role Acas plays. Both these core elements are necessary to properly exemplify the context of intervention in this thesis.

Acas

Acas is a United Kingdom, (UK), based organisation funded by the UK Government. It was founded in its current guise in 1975 as a neutral organisation to help arbitrate industrial relations and conflict during a period that was steeped in disputes that often led to strikes and discord between employers and employees. The 1970s in the United Kingdom's economic and contemporary industrial history saw a number of policies enacted by the government in an attempt to address what had become a declining domestic economy. The early 1970s Conservative administration's economic policy under prime minister Edward Heath suffered as a consequence of such events as the 1973 miners' strike, the ensuing so called '3-day week' and perpetual conflict with such iconic establishments as British Leyland (motor car manufacturers). Diminished output and reductions in gross domestic product (GDP) in part resulting from a variety of international factors such as the 1973 oil crisis, led to inflation, recession, increasing interest rates and increasing unemployment in the United Kingdom. In 1974, Labour was returned to power under Harold Wilson with a powerful left wing and trade union influence as trades union membership peaked at over 12 million members (TUC). It seems likely that the acrimonious relationships between management, employees, and trades unions in British industry required some form of intermediary to broker conditions for economic prosperity. Acas probably played one of the more important roles in enabling and facilitating some progress within such industrial behemoths such as British Steel, Leyland, British Coal, and British Rail during this destabilising period. Acas' credentials and ability to resolve some of the conflicts that characterised the 1970s and indeed 1980s were born out of a long standing role brokering resolution between industrial warring factions.

Acas has evolved significantly since its inception, claiming to trace their history back to 1896 when the then Conservative government of Gascoyne-Cecil introduced a voluntary conciliation and arbitration service. This was considered quite a revolutionary step by government at the time and was a consequence of the Home legislation program that included the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897, making the employer liable for accidents at work. The evolving nature of the workplace has led to Acas developing its role in industry and on behalf of the

Government. It has undergone a number of name changes, from the Industrial Relations Service to the Arbitration and Conciliation Service through to its current nomenclature as the Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service or Acas as it is commonly known, (Hypertext Ref. 1).

In 2007, Acas declares its aim is to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations. This is achieved by providing up-to-date information, independent advice, high quality training through work with employers and employees to solve problems and improve performance, (Hypertext Ref. 2). It is apparent that throughout the current demise of trades' union membership, which has more than halved to less than six million members since its peak in 1980, Acas' focus has shifted from playing a role in collective bargaining to individual based support interventions (Blanden et al, 2005).

Acas employs various techniques to deliver its aims and promotes its workplace model as a method for achieving a harmonious working environment (Acas workplace model, 2005). For example, it provides comprehensive training through training centres, online self administered courses or at clients' locations. This training covers a range of subjects such as discrimination, conflict management, people management, and employing people. This is what may be referred to as Acas' preventative strategies in working with organisations in the private, public, and voluntary sectors. Whilst these strategies are aimed at improving individual employees' awareness, skills, and approach to people issues, Acas is invariably contracted by the organisation or employer and not the individual or employee. Acas also employs reactionary strategies in response to issues that arise in the workplace. These activities may be in response to an individual employee's request for support, a group of people, possibly represented by a trade union, the employer, or a works council. This role is one that is currently growing, partly due to the European Council directive 2002/14/EC on employee representation and consultation and the European Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, where the European Union has expressly stated it wishes to enhance relations and promote social dialogue between management and labour.

If a case involves an employment tribunal claim, Acas offers conciliation services. Where an employment tribunal claim has not been made, Acas offers a mediation service. Conciliation is a service based on Acas acting as an impartial party whose aim is to settle the dispute in order to avoid the employment tribunal having to be heard. Acas state that the aim of conciliation is 'to settle the dispute on your own terms without the need for a tribunal'. Acas provides this service free of charge and as part of its governing charter it has a legal obligation to provide this service where requested, usually by the employee acting as an individual. Mediation is targeted at preventing the need for conciliation, that is, at the time that Acas is engaged no formal complaint has been made that would be heard by the employment tribunal. Acas encourages employees and employers to engage this service prior to a conflict in the workplace escalating. Mediation is also free of charge and is entirely voluntary. In the case of both services, Acas does not make judgements, but may if requested to do so, make recommendations.

Mediation and conciliation are forms of intervention that Acas offer in their aim to promote good working environments and to help settle workplace disputes as quickly and as easily as possible, whilst engaging all parties voluntarily in the process. Whilst this has traditionally formed the overt and well known role that Acas has played, particularly in high profile cases such as the miners' strike in 1984 and latterly the London underground strikes in 1999, Acas' role has changed in recent years. The period following the industrial disputes of the 1970s and 1980s has for Acas been characterised by a changing focus and workload in favour of the individual rather than the collective representation of trades' union delegations. This has inevitably meant that the labour intensive and time consuming approach that is characterised by traditional mediation and conciliation has become an unsustainable model for Acas to follow. This is because the public funding structure that enables Acas to operate is insufficient to provide for the number of conciliators and mediators that would be required.

Partly because of the shift in Acas' demand for services towards individual employees, and also to meet the services demanded by employees and employers, a national telephone helpline was established in 2001. The helpline was established also to respond to enquiries from employees and employers in relation

to an increasingly complex legal landscape in employment law, employee rights, performance management, compensation, dismissal, grievance, diversity, and equality. The Acas National Helpline Survey (2007) notes that the advisors who operate the helpline fulfil an important role in its success, having to keep up to date with often complicated information on a wide range of employment issues, and deal with callers sensitively and appropriately. In 2006, the helpline received approximately 908,000 calls, (Hooker et al, 2007). The National Helpline Survey provides a significant amount of information that helps inform the reader as to the perception that callers to the helpline have of the service; the reasons for calls to the helpline, and the resultant outcome or consequence of the call.

The helpline provides a plethora of support in many disciplines. It is impractical to determine how many calls are in relation to workplace bullying for a number of reasons. First, calls made to the helpline are anonymous. This policy seems partly to be a symbolic gesture by Acas to demonstrate the confidentiality they offer. Therefore, there is no conventional contact centre management information reporting (for example the reason for the call, the outcome of the call or whether the call was a repeat contact) that can be drawn upon, which is often used to determine key performance indicators, staff skill and training requirements, and levels of consumer satisfaction. Using myriad data points however has been challenged as ineffective in managing contact centres where orientation towards customer engagement is important (for example see Feinberg et al 2000 and Murray et al 2004). Second, it is asserted here that such classifications as grievance may be workplace bullying related. This is because bullying does not appear as a classification in its own right; however, the body of research suggests that typically between 10% and 50% of people are bullied in the workplace (Zapf 1999 and Rayner 1997). Recent UK evidence from Grainger and Fitzner (2007) suggests the figure is 5.4%, with O'Connell et al (2007) citing 7.8% in Ireland. It may be argued that due to the subjective nature of bullying, a possible inability in coining a commonly held definition may make it difficult for a caller to identify with the label of having been the subject of a workplace bullying episode (for example see Lewis 2002 and Saunders et al 2007). It has also been noted that some people feel a shame in having been bullied (Menesini and Camodeca, 2008, (bullying of children) and Lewis, 2004, (workplace bullying). It may be possible

therefore, that some callers may have disguised their specific reason for requesting support and identified with a broader more generic category of grievance.

Acas' Helpline Survey 2007 (Acas 2007a) is a useful source of data that helps illustrate the helpline operation and to a limited extent its levels of success. The following comments are extracted from this report. It appears that people who call the helpline are satisfied with the outcome of the interaction with Acas and that the call was very influential in the caller's decision making progress as to how their personal situation was progressed. Callers to the helpline are generally pleased with the levels of access to advisors, now considered a hygiene factor in any call centre interaction (Mermelstein and Abu-Shalback 2006), the content of the advice given, and their next actions following the advice given. Typically, callers make 3-4 calls to the helpline per annum, which could imply that the service offered by Acas is beneficial to the caller. Alternatively, it could equally imply that callers either have multiple reasons to call, inferring that their workplace may be dysfunctional, or that the outcome of the previous calls did not actually address the problem about which they called. There is no evidence to substantiate these comments in Acas' survey.

Importantly, callers also rate highly the capability and behaviour of the advisors to whom they speak. This attribute of satisfaction is considered important; the engagement between the caller and the advisor during the intervention that takes place is essential to the caller being able to believe that the information they have been given is appropriate to their needs. This assertion is made at different levels. First, the overt behaviour of the advisor and caller and the ensuing discourse that manifests itself is likely to have an impact on the outcome of the intervention episode. The overt behaviour consists of such attributes as tone of voice and choice of language. Visible body language is clearly absent from the interaction as the relationship is telephone based. This means that the interpretation both parties place on what is heard is of significant importance in the discourse.

Second, the situation that the caller may be experiencing when engaging Acas could be one that is distressing. The advisors employed by Acas are trained to

deal with callers who may be upset, angry, confused and often in need of someone knowledgeable to turn towards for advice. The levels of anxiety and distress experienced by the callers appear to have some influence on the levels of satisfaction they have with the service offered by Acas.

Third, those who have contacted Acas' helpline and who have left their place of work at the time of calling, (although the reasons for leaving are not known), have significantly lower levels of satisfaction with the outcome of the call than those who are in the employ of the organisation at the time of the call. This point may support Acas' position and that of Gibbons (2007) that the need to address conflict in the earliest possible stages of escalation is an important factor in providing a prosperous working environment.

Fourth, there are also indications in the Helpline Survey that empathy is an important facet of the relationship between caller and advisor. The advisor has to balance professionalism and impartiality whilst demonstrating that the caller's needs are understood and addressed. These elements of the interaction are measured using the following questions:

- The advisor was knowledgeable
- The advisor behaved in a professional manner showed
- The advisor presented the information in an impartial way
- The advisor understood the caller's query
- The advisor gave the caller enough time to discuss their query
- The advisor presented the information in a way the caller easily understood

Each of the above statements attracted high scores suggesting that the empathetic balance required in the interaction is being met by the Acas advisors. Empathy is argued here to be a subjective phenomenon. Abercrombie et al (2000) describe empathy from a number of different perspectives. First, they assert that empathy is a basic social skill, acquired through the process of socialisation. Second, that empathy is an ability to anticipate and respond to others' social gestures. Third, that empathy is a psychological concomitant that demands actors are able to

imagine alternative social arrangements. The descriptions offered by Abercrombie et al (2000) all appear to be relevant and necessary skills for the Acas helpline advisor for them to provide a service that provides a positive outcome for the caller. The context of empathy in the Acas helpline is argued here to be a component of an individual advisor's emotional being. This is because the empathy that is required in any intervention episode necessitates an element of emotional labour. Zapf and Holz (2006) suggest that emotional labour is defined as emotional regulation required to display organisationally desired emotions by the employees. Abercrombie et al (2000) assert that prescribed, displayed emotions have ceased to be private and now have commercial value.

This explanation of emotional labour in a service industry context is of limited use when considering the Acas helpline for a number of reasons. First, Acas is not a profit making organisation. It appears that much of the literature that discusses emotional labour is often private sector oriented, (that is, the emotional labour is employed as part of the profit maximisation policies of the organisation (for example, Feinberg et al 2000). Second, the level of prescription in the context of emotional labour is limited to the advisor not taking sides in the discussion, (typically between the employer and the employee). A wide ranging review of the literature for research in the empathy required by call centre operatives, where the interaction is of a personal and emotional nature, revealed little useful material. It is apparent that the engagement of employees in call centre environments focuses upon customer engagement and satisfaction (for examples see Morris and Feldman 1997, Gans et al 2003, and Green et al 2003).

Investigations for research into such UK based organisations as The Samaritans, Childline, and NHS Direct as organisations with comparable aims in their telephone based activities yielded no beneficial results when focusing on the relationship between caller and advisor. It is beyond the boundaries of this thesis to explain why such information seems to be unavailable. Drawing upon Acas' policies, however, such interactions as those that are likely to take place in the organisations above would suggest that the working relationship between advisor and caller may be considered confidential and aspects of research ethics become barriers to scholarly study.

The telephone call made to Acas is considered here to be a vehicle for the person calling to find a solution to the problem they are facing in their workplace, in this case, workplace bullying. The person calling may not be the direct target; the employer, a friend, relation or colleague could be the caller. It is clear from the comments above that the call to Acas itself is an important moment in the chronology of a workplace bullying episode. Of equal interest to this thesis, however, is the result or consequence of the call and what events ensued.

The Acas 2007 helpline survey (Acas 2007a) has a number of aims; one with particular relevance to this thesis is to understand what course of action callers took following their call to Acas. This is a very important aspect of Acas' research into the telephone helpline. It is postulated here that the call to Acas is only a component part of the resolution of any workplace dispute. It could be described as a 'means to an end'. That is, it is simply a vehicle for either providing options for solutions to employees and employers, or to provide a 'signposting' service to another agency that may be better placed to offer the appropriate help.

There are a number of challenges Acas face in empirically determining the success of the service they provide via the helpline. First, they do not have a means of routinely and regularly contacting callers to establish the outcome of the intervention episode with Acas. The only data that is available is via the survey Acas conducts on an annual basis, surveying approximately 1000 callers from a population of 850,000 calls received by the helpline each year. Second, the survey's aim does not seem to establish the success of the intervention. For example, Acas ask questions about what happened after the call. These are illustrated in Figure 1.1 below. The survey however does not enquire whether the actions implemented actually resolved the issue that originally instigated the call to the helpline. Acas however does use the caller's response to two questions as 'quasi-proxy' instruments that may be somewhat successful in determining the level of success of the helpline. In the case of the employer calling, the question relates to the implementation or modification of existing policies. In the case of

the employee calling, the measure that Acas use is the intent to make a claim in the Employment Tribunal.

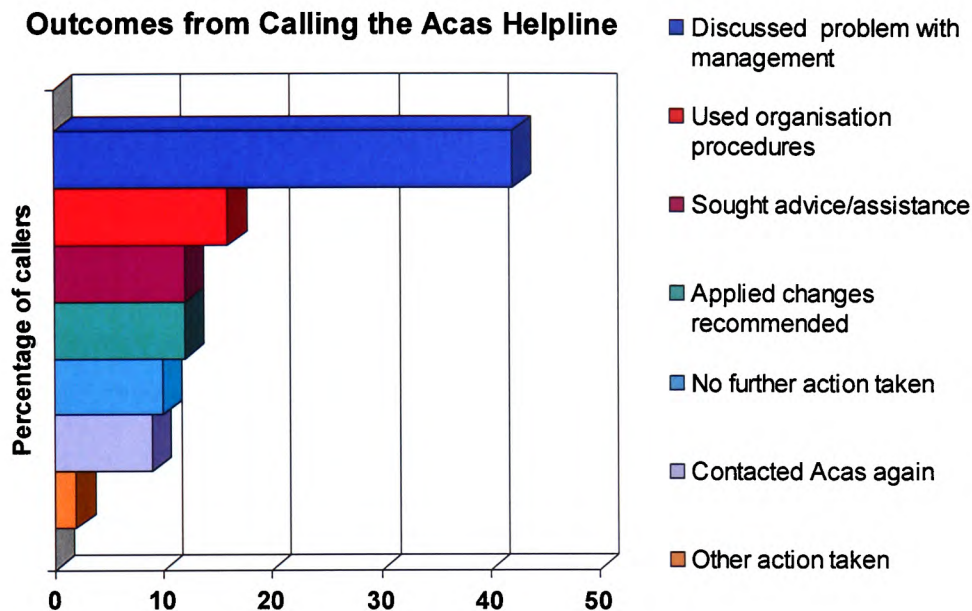


Figure 1.1: Outcomes from calls made to the Acas helpline

This measure appears to be flawed in that 77% of those surveyed stated that this latter course of action was not appropriate to their particular situation. It is also important to note that of those surveyed who were considering a formal claim, 70% said that their call to Acas was very important and instrumental in their decision making process. Together with other data in the survey, this offers an interesting basket of information. It is reasonable to infer from the survey that the helpline is a successful venture, staffed by knowledgeable, friendly people, who having understood the caller's situation and requirements, are able to give useful advice. It is also beneficial to understand that following the call, the majority of people took further action, thereby suggesting that it was likely the signposting that Acas offered was useful.

Whilst none of this data relates specifically to workplace bullying, it can be identified from the survey that the largest call reason is from circumstances that are likely to include workplace bullying, (Figure 1.2 refers). It is unclear whether the other reason categories may be related to workplace bullying. In assuming a

position that orients itself towards the workplace bullying paradigm, the survey implies some points that are interesting, but that cannot be empirically stated as reliable and valid data from the survey. First, the caller was likely to have been able to use the information provided by Acas and act upon it. Second, the single biggest course of action taken from the call was to discuss the problem with management. These two points, whilst drawing upon the data in a non-scientific way, may be reasons to draw some conclusions that the helpline is able to offer some help to those who are being bullied in the workplace and/or those employers who are trying to address such matters.

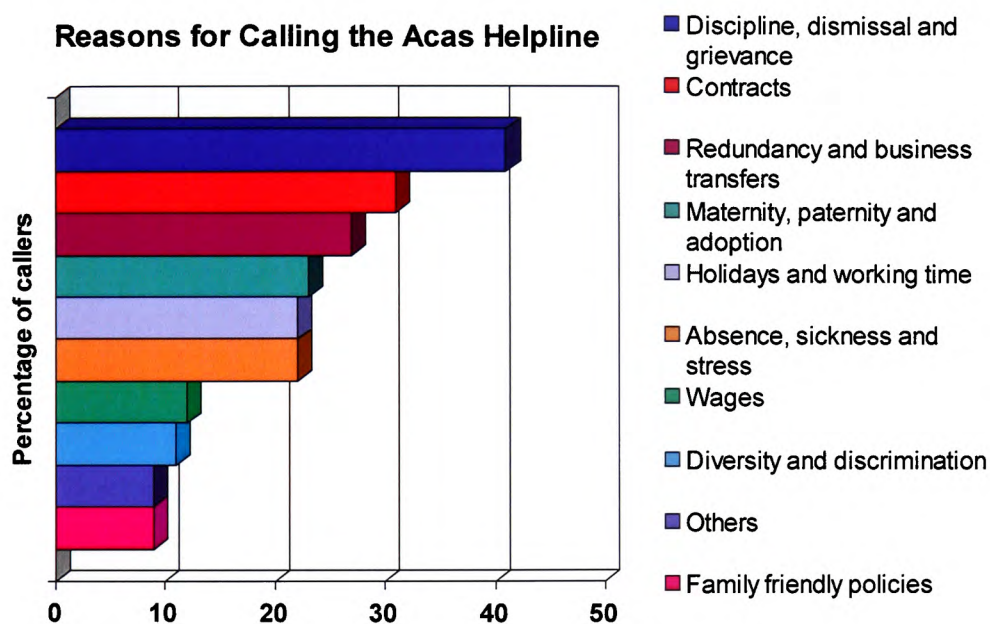


Figure 1.2: Call reasons for calls made to the Acas helpline

As previously stated, the survey is an interesting and useful management tool with which to assess the internal performance of the helpline operation. The survey instrument, however, offers this study a very limited contribution in addressing the aim of the thesis.

Aim of thesis

Having described the boundaries of the thesis earlier in this chapter, it is important to explicitly state the aims. The recent growth in interest in workplace bullying has been described as like a delayed train; late but expected (Lewis 2002). Maybe

the expectations have conditioned commentators, the media and actors set within the discourse to have what could be described as sub-conscious pre-conceived notions that have been constructed within the self and through an almost osmotic process via the media and other social sources such as family and friends. It is argued here that this has led to a series of themes in the research and in social commentary. There has been a significant contribution to the workplace bullying debate that focuses on what could be described as the core aspects of the subject. These are the bullied party (for example, Meglich-Sespico et al, 2007, Hogh and Dofradottir, 2001, and Groeblinghoff and Becker, 1996), various antecedents to bullying (for example, Heames et al 2006 and Glaso et al, 2007), and the impacts of bullying (for example, Hoel et al, 2004 and Tehrani, 2004). It is clear that these pillars of study within the workplace bullying research framework are of paramount importance to understand the problem. Nonetheless, there is much left to pursue given the number of research articles that have, by their authors' admission, significant limitations and also open up new avenues for others to study, (for example the levels of success when addressing workplace bullying).

More recently, there have been developments in a number of areas that may be considered topics within the research debate that underpin the core subjects previously suggested. Such avenues include the international dimension, (Maraiss-Steinman 2003), the relationship to employees' health, (Vartia et al 2003), organisational effectiveness, (Hoel and Salin 2003), and risk groups and sectors, (Notelaers et al 2006). At the European Association of Work and Organisational Psychology conference held in Stockholm in May 2007, 25 papers were presented that focused on workplace bullying, from countries including Turkey, the USA, France, Germany, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom. Each one of these scholarly submissions converged on the target of bullying or the context in which the episode was situated. Only two additional papers centred upon organisational intervention, (Salin 2007 and Rayner 2007). Both of these papers concentrated on an organisational approach to preventing bullying through proactive intervention with training and awareness and adopting a robust stance in the event that bullying occurred.

At the 6th International Conference on Workplace Bullying held in Montreal in June 2008, there were numerous examples of submissions regarding intervention, (for example Mikkelsen et al, 2008 and Crawshaw, 2008). Similarly, however, there perspective focused on so-called organisational intervention and fell somewhat short of addressing an individualistic approach. These examples of the importance of the intervention debate within the wider workplace bullying research agenda suggests that there is possibly some catching up required by those commentators with an interest in intervention. This thesis will contribute to the intervention research studies in workplace bullying.

The undisputed level of interest in the subject from commentators in many parts of the world, many of whom are contributing significant research to the debate seems unquestionable. However, despite this level of interest, it seems that there are areas and philosophical aspects of the workplace bullying debate that have yet to be addressed and warrant attention. This assertion is made on a number of fronts. First, the dominance of positivism in the research seems to continue to somewhat suppress the interpretive school. Researchers such as Liefoghe (2001), Lewis, (2004) and McCarthy, (2001) remain in a distinct minority in trying to represent and understand such aspects as the role of 'voices' in and the social construction of, workplace bullying. It is proffered here that these interpretive paradigms should be able to co-exist juxtaposed with positivist contributions steeped in a tradition of psychology, bringing benefits that would otherwise remain absent from the body of knowledge.

The aim of the thesis is to understand the role of individualised third party intervention, which appears not to have been the specific subject of any study to date. There have been studies into intervention in workplace bullying. For example, Hoel and Giga (2006) presented a paper sponsored by the British Occupational Health Research Foundation (BOHRF). This paper however focused on management interventions within the organisation, such as training and awareness communication of workplace bullying. Fisher and Keashley (1990) studied third party intervention into international and inter-group conflict. They developed a contingency approach and produced a model from this research that may be useful in the context of workplace bullying. Tehrani (2003) uses

multiple theoretical models of counselling to explain how they may be able to contribute to a resolution model in workplace bullying. Mikkelsen, Hogh and Olesen, (2008) have recently concluded a two year study into the prevention of workplace bullying through proactive intervention.

These previous studies provide useful signposting and substantial data sets to help inform and guide this research. None of these studies has specifically focused on third party intervention in workplace bullying and maybe more importantly, none of them have sought to understand the role the third party plays in the bullying episode. The key aim of this thesis is to understand what role the third party plays when intervening in a case of workplace bullying.

The second aim of the thesis is to understand the role the third party plays by adopting a position that makes the enquiry through an interpretive lens. This thesis is adopting a qualitative approach to the research, and it is argued the more important aspect of the research is to understand how the intervention unfolds and what characterises the discourses that flow throughout. Additionally, of significant importance is that the research will be conducted through enquiry made with the third party, which appears to be a perspective that has not previously been studied. In order to satisfy the aims of this thesis, one must understand the responses from key participants in the research by listening to their accounts, experiences and answers to questions that cannot be achieved using such instruments as questionnaires. Whilst the generalisability of such research data is limited, it greatly benefits the overall body of knowledge by offering context and meaning as well as quantitative data.

Structure of thesis

In order to provide the reader with a map of the thesis structure, a brief explanation follows that outlines the research topic, provides a brief overview of each chapter and builds on setting the boundaries of each constituent element of the research.

This research project will investigate the role that the Acas telephone helpline plays when dealing with callers who contact them in relation to cases of

workplace bullying. The term helpline in this project may be regarded as a synonym for the organisational setting within Acas that operationally and strategically leads and manages the helpline. This is because the research project has sought to cast a net wider than just the helpline advisors in seeking research data. For example, managers, directors, and analysts have been drawn into the research in an attempt to garner a more holistic understanding of the role of the helpline and thus help to construct a more thorough understanding of the role the helpline plays. Additionally, telephone mediators, field mediators, and conciliators have been included in the interviews. This has been a deliberate move because many of these people either previously were employed as telephone helpline advisors or work closely with them in their day to day work. This means that they may be contributing to the way in which the helpline deals with cases of workplace bullying and therefore have an important voice in the story of the research.

The choice of Acas as an organisation to study rather than other organisations was a relatively straightforward exercise. Acas is unique in its position between Government, industry and the trades unions. It has a well known brand image and is seen as an 'honest broker' with a 'repertoire of experience' (Dix and Oxenbridge 2004). These factors were considered important features in the organisation in the context of selecting them as the research subject organisation. Alternative organisations could include trades unions and professional organisations contact helplines, citizens' advice bureau, legal helplines, and self help groups. On examination, none of these satisfied the criteria required for the research project; that they were not affiliated to any cause or 'side' and they were focused on the workplace or organisation. Whilst Acas was therefore considered the most appropriate, some shortcomings in the selection and organisation should be recognised.

First, the targets and strategic direction of Acas as an Executive Agency (EA) of Government are clearly influenced by the instrument of state. Second, the targets therefore are subject to political sway and therefore potentially could reflect manifestoes for example that are not necessarily congruent with the pure best interests of Acas and the service they aspire to provide. Third, in a similar vein,

the financial resource afforded to Acas is exclusively dependent on government budgets and therefore Acas priorities and strategic deployment may be manipulated by budgetary constraints.

Access to the organisation was possible across many levels including the higher tiers of management. From an operational perspective, some difficulties existed in accessing front line helpline advisors when they were particularly busy. This necessitated numerous visits to numerous locations, especially regarding the focus groups where multiple advisors were required at the same time, therefore exacerbating the challenges in responding to calls.

Acas being the organisation who have been deemed 'most neutral' has potential shortcomings as well as benefits. Probably the most important limitation in selecting Acas however is their neutrality. This means that they cannot make recommendations of any sort whatsoever, only provide appropriate advice to facilitate the caller with the knowledge or signposting to acquire the knowledge to make a decision on the next step in their endeavour. They do not follow up cases; they simply offer unbiased advice when asked. These facets of Acas' fundamental composition are symbolic in the way in which the data collection exercise must be assembled. This is because the basis on which Acas was founded exhorts employees and employers to engage on the basis of trust and fairness. Over many years, the notion of impartiality and honesty seem to have become interwoven into Acas' organisational culture and therefore as a researcher entering the organisation, the behaviour and respect exhibited towards the organisation's values are important points to acknowledge in order to maximise the opportunity of yielding rich data.

The data for this research project was obtained through semi structured interviews and focus groups. The semi structured interviews were conducted with helpline advisors, operational team managers, telephone mediators, conciliators and senior managers. The aim of these interviews was to establish the realities constructed by each group of people about the role of the telephone helpline in advising callers about issues related to workplace bullying. The helpline advisor interview data has been classified as the core data, with data from other interviews being

classified as 'key informant' data. By comparing individualised accounts of the questions posed, it might be possible to determine if any similarities, differences, key themes, or messages are apparent. The interviews were conducted at various Acas regional office locations across the UK. It is important to note that the telephone calls presented to helpline advisors are not geographically constrained, (for example, a call made from Glasgow would not necessarily be routed to the Acas office in Scotland).

Focus groups were also held with the Acas employees. These involved some employees who had not been interviewed, but did work at the same office of those who had been interviewed. The purpose of these sessions was to establish if any themes emerged from group discussion that may have been inadvertently omitted from the interviews due to either the questioning content and style or the respondents' level of engagement in the interview. If a material difference in responses is experienced, this could affect the way in which this study addresses its aims and draws upon previous research and literatures.

Chapters two and three present a critical review of relevant literatures. The literature review aims to enlighten the reader and offer an in depth, critical appraisal of previous research. This review aims to examine critically the history of workplace bullying and how the research debate has evolved over the past 10-15 years. Implicit in this history and the ensuing commentary in chapter two and three is a discussion around the definition that behoves workplace bullying. The criticality in this part of the chapter strives to balance a respect for previous research, whilst challenging some of the research norms that appear to be establishing themselves in the ongoing debate, without becoming a debilitating critique to the reader. The literature reviews also seek to enquire what bullying behaviour may 'look like' and how this may be explained, justified and identified. This is important following an explanation of a definition of workplace bullying to assist the reader in trying to draw some relationship between the commentary on definitions and behaviours. It may be useful for the definitions and behaviours to demonstrate some resonance and similarity for the reader to be able to further pursue the chapters. In order to explain bullying behaviours with greater context

and philosophical underpinnings, a departure from workplace bullying is made to explore theories and commentary on power.

Reasons for workplace bullying are explored through the lens of the organisation and the individual. This approach is aimed at being congruent with the prevailing research traditions and aims to investigate critically reasons for bullying based on an interpretive approach to the research. The chapters draw to a close outlining the consequences of bullying and inviting the reader to explore the following chapter with a view to investigating whether there are possible linkages that may be further investigated as part of the research project.

Chapters four and five conclude the first part of the thesis by exploring the theories of intervention. Intervention is a key theme of this thesis and whilst the notion of intervention, the phenomenon of workplace bullying, and theoretical constructs could have been assimilated into chapters two and three, it was deemed appropriate to offer two chapters exclusively committed to explaining intervention from a critical perspective. The chapters get underway by outlining the various constructs of intervention. This is followed with a greater examination of intervention concentrating upon the individual and interventions in a dyadic setting. The commentary also explores the identity of self and interpersonal relationships to provide grounding in these theories. Having established the theories around intervention, these are then contrasted with interventions that are known to take place in the construct of workplace bullying.

Chapter six presents a conventional methodology statement which establishes the research design and methods. The research consists of 17 semi structured interviews and 2 focus groups over a 3 month period in 2007 in the UK. Data collection was conducted wholly by the author. The author has presented the responses in a manner that aims to be void of bias and judgement in terms of what might be considered the 'right approach'. It is noteworthy that the themes that emerge in the data and that are presented in the results are not 'value judgements' made by the author. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the role played by Acas, as a third party, when intervening in cases of workplace bullying. It is not the role of this thesis to judge the effectiveness of Acas' intervention. Nor does

the thesis determine any conclusions about the bullying episodes to which participants may refer. The data is presented according to the themes that have emerged from the interviews and focus groups. The data has not been wholly transcribed in this thesis and is not chronological in its presentation. This is to allow the author to provide an appropriate structure to the results, and to allow the reader to assimilate the data in an efficient and comprehensive manner. In attempting to understand the interventionist role played by Acas, there are likely to be various points where the author and reader may judge the data.

Chapters seven, eight and nine present the responses and commentary, drawing upon previous research in the field of workplace bullying as well as allied ranges of literature. The discussion invites the reader to focus the attention on Acas. There may be some compulsion to take the data and apply the findings from the perspective of the person calling Acas. This is not the purpose or aim of this thesis, but possibly does present questions for others to pursue. The discussion of the results is also intended to provoke thought as to how the results could be interpreted by both academics and practitioners. As this thesis is a DBA, it is important that the discussion resonates with industry practitioners as well as those whose focus is solely within the academic environment.

Chapter 10 closes the thesis by reflecting on the responses from a holistic perspective, stepping back from the details that have emerged and reviewing the aims of the thesis. Has the thesis identified the role that Acas fulfils when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying? What realities are constructed by the participants of this research in respect of intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying that have led to this understanding? How has this research informed and contributed to the workplace bullying debate? What insight has this study to offer Acas as it evolves and developed its services?

Summary

This chapter has provided a prologue of the subject and concept of workplace bullying and intervention. It has also situated the phenomenon of workplace bullying in a social context, prior to introducing Acas as the organisation being studied in this research thesis. Having laid out the aims and structure of the

thesis, the next chapter will provide a comprehensive and critical literature review around which the theoretical constructs of this research are located.

Chapter 2: Literature Review I

Chapter Introduction

It has been suggested in Chapter one that workplace bullying is an increasingly evident feature in today's workplace. Heames et al (2006) claim that 78% of respondents to a survey believe that workplace bullying has worsened in the past ten years. Serantes and Suarez (2006) contest that the phenomenon known as workplace bullying is increasing in terms of physical and psychological abuse. Previous research suggests that the frequency of workplace bullying varies between approximately 1% (Hubert et al 2001) and 50% (Rayner 1997), depending on such factors as work type (Archer, 1999), and country, (Lutgen-Sandvik et al 2007). Zapf et al (2003, p.105) provide a summary of the accounts researched up to 2001. There has been an initial justification offered that supports calls for further contribution to the research agenda, (for example, Saunders, 2007, and Hoel and Giga, 2006), which in turn reinforces the need for this thesis, and in later chapters it will be shown, the contribution to knowledge that the thesis will make. Chapter two aims to elaborate on the opening discussion through critical evaluation of the existing literature on the history and definitions of workplace bullying. Chapter three will take the literature review further by critically examining subjects that often sit on the periphery of the workplace bullying debate. Such subjects include the role that the media plays in informally representing the perspectives of employees and employers through broadcast and written journalism. In addition, the provisions made within UK and European law, for example within the Human Rights Act, 1998 and the Employment Act, 2002 and the European Law on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms all contribute to the rich debate that is increasingly evident in the workplace in 2008.

Additionally non governmental organisations such as the Commission for Race Equality and topically, in 2007 the emerging new agency, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights has established itself following assent of the Equality Act, 2006. This provides a voice for justice in the workplace. Justice in the workplace has traditionally been the role of trades unionism and indeed the growth and rejuvenation of trades' unionism in the UK in the 21st century means their contribution towards matters such as workplace conflict as well as bullying

remains a significant and important discourse within the debate. Increasingly, industry professional bodies for both management and directors, such as the Chartered Management Institute, the Institute of Directors and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development have become strong industry voices, which often reach beyond their membership in the quest for promoting practices in the workplace that support social justice and complement the work of the trades unions. This is important because such organisations as those mentioned above broaden the discourse and realities of workplace bullying to an audience such as managers and leaders who could be considered one of the perpetrators of this phenomenon.

The media may sometimes influence and contribute to the workplace bullying debate albeit not necessarily in an overt way. Their role purports to provide information that is of public interest. Whilst they may fulfil this aim, there is inevitably a complex web of predisposed opinion, bias, and impartiality possibly driven by political climates, societal demand, and conformance to socially accepted norms. The messages the media convey and the discourses they contribute to, and perhaps create, become important apparatus that influence opinions over the workplace bullying debate in a holistic way. The ways in which academic and social discourses co-exist is important to recognise. The traditional research philosophy in workplace bullying may sometimes fall short of appreciating the social contexts of bullying, possibly driven or influenced by media commentary.

The History of Bullying Research

In examining the history of workplace bullying, numerous significant junctures can be identified that have contributed to the research debate. First, in considering the origins of contemporary research into workplace bullying, there is significant evidence that shows the debate was borne out of the increased interest that began to emerge in the 1970s surrounding school bullying. This research was pioneered by Heinemann, (1972), with the most prominent researcher in the field being the Norwegian, Olweus, (e.g., Olweus, 1978). Whilst his thesis will not address the subject of school bullying it cannot be ignored in examining the

chronology of workplace bullying literature as it has informed the workplace bullying research and is an important part of the exegesis of the subject.

The research on bullying of children in schools is far more extensive than the workplace bullying aspect of the phenomenon, (for example, see Bauer, 2007, Smith et al, 2004 and Dake et al, 2003). Schools bullying research is discreet from workplace bullying research. After extensive searches, there appears to be little research that demonstrates a linkage between the two subjects, with the possible exception of Smith et al (2003). The relationship between workplace bullying research and bullying of children in schools is also evident through Olweus having been Einarsen's doctoral supervisor, who has since become one of the most often cited commentators in the workplace bullying field.

Brodsky (1976) (cited in Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996) appears to have been the first contemporary academic commentator who published work on workplace bullying. It is relevant that Brodsky did not refer to the phenomenon as workplace bullying. The title of the work, "The Harassed Worker" has wider overtones. More recent workplace bullying research and literature appears to avoid using the term harassment. Maybe this is because the debate has matured sufficiently to set boundaries around the definition that would exclude the looser notion of harassment. Those academics who have researched workplace bullying appear to be generally accepting of the late Heinz Leymann as the pioneering researcher and commentator on workplace bullying, having first published work in the mid 1980s, although not in English. This early work by Leymann, a psychotherapist, which was followed by other Scandinavian and German commentators, (for example Groebtinghoff and Becker 1996, Niedl 1996, and Einarsen et al 1994), follows the academic traditions of psychology and indeed the majority of researchers active in the field today continue to adopt and follow the Scandinavian lead.

The positivist epistemology and ontology adopted by Leymann led him to develop a research measurement instrument known as LIPT or Leymann's Inventory of Personal Terrorisation. This was one of the most referred to instruments for research in the 1990s. As the research debate has evolved, however, new

positivistic means of gathering data have emerged. Einarsen et al developed first the Bergen Bullying Index, (Einarsen et al 1994) which is direct in questioning individuals as to whether they are being bullied or not. Additionally, some questionnaires have been employed with the original intent of not necessarily measuring workplace bullying. For example, the Questionnaire on Assessment and Experience of Work, or VBBA, (Hubert and Veldhoven 2001) and the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (Rahim and Magner 1995) depict cases in point. There are also instances where surveys have been developed using components of several different questionnaires, for example, Vartia (1996), who draws on Leymann's LIPT and uses this in conjunction with an occupational stress questionnaire, where the validity and reliability of the tool has already been reviewed and accepted, thus inferring a more credible result.

The emergent nature of the workplace bullying research school has also resulted in multiple survey instruments being used together in one research event. For example, Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) use the NAQ and the Hopkins Symptom Checklist. This technique enables the researcher to combine bullying data with data that measures other factors that may be of interest, such as symptoms of anxiety and depression. This is a welcomed contribution to the body of knowledge as it enables researchers to better interpret the data gathered and reveal signposts for future work. For example, are researchers assuming that workplace bullying causes anxiety and depression or are people with anxiety and depression likely to find themselves targets of workplace bullying?

The development of Einarsen and Raknes' Negative Acts Questionnaire, (NAQ), (1997) was an important juncture in the workplace bullying school and together with LIPT probably remains one of the more dominant survey devices used by researchers today. This instrument was modified in 2001 adapting it for use in the UK by Einarsen and Hoel (2001). The NAQ has been used in a number of important and well respected studies, for example, Hoel et al, (2001), Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001), Salin (2001) and recently Lewis and Gunn (2007), which have been influential in guiding the research debate and developing the workplace bullying body of knowledge.

The NAQ contains questions that refer to negative acts in the workplace from a behavioural perspective. The questionnaire asks the respondent to identify the frequency with which they may experience these negative acts during a six month period. The questionnaire does not use the word bullying, however, it is apparent from some examples of where the instrument has been employed that a definition of bullying has preceded the questionnaire, (for example, Burnes and Pope, 2007 and Salin 2001).

The NAQ has also been modified to make it more compatible with local cultures and organisational norms, (for example see Offarel and Collins 2005). It may be argued that this model is well validated and reliable given its use in different circumstances and environments. Equally, however, it seems reasonable to challenge the reliability and validity of the model if it needs to be modified to suit specific audiences (for example, university staff) in particular countries, alien to where it was originally used (for example, Australia). Whilst this is not intended as a criticism of what has become a well established research instrument, it does encourage the academic community to consider the subjectivity of the phenomenon of workplace bullying in that the content of the NAQ may not be applicable to a wide range of survey respondents. For example, Offarel and Collins, (2005) noted that one question referring to practical jokes may be irrelevant in a university as such occurrences were highly unlikely. This assertion by them is not argued here, rather that the social construction of a university (or any other establishment) and the realities constructed by actors within it means that a positivistic research approach to a subject, based on Offarel and Collins' observations, may be inappropriate.

The majority of workplace bullying research is quantitative in its method, (see Coyne et al, 2003, Salin, 2001 and Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996 for examples). This dominant approach of inquiry has resulted in the workplace bullying agenda being informed and directed in a particular manner. The philosophical traditions of positivism means that the way researchers have thought about the subject and mobilised research is informed by a specific way of thinking; a specific approach to research and the way the research is undertaken all of which contributes to drawing out meanings and understandings that are characterised by this

philosophical tradition. This has inevitably led to a particular style of results, conclusions, and discussions. Is the data and results that ensue from this quantitative research approach appropriate in the field of workplace bullying? Positivism requires reliability and validity to be demonstrated by the researcher, whereas the interpretive school does not, focusing more on meaning and understanding. The question that is postulated here is whether either presents a more appropriate method of research into workplace bullying.

The complex interpersonal relationships between actors and the discourse inherent in the workplace bullying phenomenon being studied may benefit from a more interpretive approach. In their paper calling for a contextualised and interdisciplinary approach to workplace bullying, Hoel and Beale, (2006, p.256) conclude that the qualitative approach associated with the social science philosophy, (for examples see Hallberg and Strandmark, 2006, Hutchinson et al 2005, Liefhoghe, 2003, Lewis and Rayner, 2003, and Sjøtveit, 1992), “does open up new angles to the debate.” Some approaches, cited by Rayner et al (1999), include focus groups, critical incident technique, (see also Rayner, 1998) and the use of vignettes. Additionally, Hutchinson et al (2005) used in depth, semi structured, guided interviews coupled with the researcher using a personal reflective journal. Liefhoghe and Olafsson (1999) refer to the quantitative approach to workplace bullying research as the “expert perspective”. They cite Einarsen (1996) who suggested that there is an intrinsic difficulty in measuring an inherently subjective topic with methods that are designed to be objective. Rayner et al (1999), propose that the definitional boundaries and perspectives of workplace bullying largely determine what needs to be studied and as this evolves so should the methodologies chosen.

The suggestion by Rayner et al (1999) and the relevance to this thesis may be illustrated by reviewing the point they and Liefhoghe and Olafsson (1999) make about understanding the process and operationalisation of bullying rather than creating an objective understanding of the event itself. In terms of intervention, the process, engagement, and relationship between those offering intervention and the victim are central to this thesis. It is therefore argued that the understanding of the realities created through the process of social construction is of greatest

importance at this juncture. The voices that represent the realities being researched in this thesis need to be considered from what Liefoghe and MacKenzie-Davey (2003) explain as a post modern philosophy. Maybe the most important point they make is that in trying to understand a phenomenon such as workplace bullying, the researcher must question whose interest is being served in this understanding.

Workplace bullying has been inferred as an emotive subject (for example, Tehrani 2004 and Saunders 2007). The emotion may well be catalysed from the various interests that actors believe need to be served; the bully, the victim, the organisation to name but a few. Others within the discourse may include groups or social structures. These features of the qualitative research school could not be included in a quantitative approach. This requires the researcher to question both approaches in terms of their appropriateness and value in the creation of knowledge. The interest in this thesis is intervention and therefore the relevance of understanding the various voices, opinions, and vested interests is critical to explaining the role of intervention. Thereafter, it may be possible to base further quantitative research on this work. Such an approach, however, requires an understanding before a more objective approach may be utilised.

Definitions of Bullying

The definition of bullying is still a subject of significant discussion amongst academic commentators, for example see Einarsen (1998), Einarsen (1999, p.17), Hoel and Cooper (2001, p.3), Rayner et al (2002, p.8), Lewis and Sheehan (2003), Lewis (2004), and Saunders et al (2007). This word bullying in English is primarily defined as a group of riotous or disorderly people and originates from 1690 from the phrase *mōbile vulgus* meaning literally the moveable common people. Nonetheless, it seems useful to draw upon a preferred interpretation and definition to use as a point of reference although in attempting to understand others' realities, it is possibly equally unwise to restrict the meaning of the term at this stage. This seems to be a relatively common theme in the research; as Lewis (2004) comments, depending on who one talks to, evidence can reveal multiple realities of bullying at work. This is because it is apparent in the research debate that even the most experienced commentators appear to offer differing definitions

or ways of explaining the phenomenon of workplace bullying. For example, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001, p.468 and 2003, p.97), both experienced researchers in the field, offer two considerably different ways of defining and explaining the phenomenon, which may reflect the research approach for the specific paper, the development in the research debate or maybe their personal development in rationalising and understanding the phenomenon. Rayner (2002, p.123) pursues the dynamic meaning of the term workplace bullying where she suggests that not only is the meaning of workplace bullying subjective, but also will change over time depending on one's experiences. This supports the notion that workplace bullying is part of a socially constructed world and for it to be properly understood, it is necessary to understand the discourses that make up the phenomenon. Davenport et al (2002), cited in Lutgen-Sandvik, (2007) suggest that defining bullying should be categorised by degrees of harm, similar to first, second and third degree burns. The context of what would be contained in each 'degree' of bullying seemingly remains an unaddressed topic within Davenport's (2002) research. Saunders et al (2007) implicitly pursue the notion that the definition of bullying is not only dynamic in nature but also dependent on the individual's position. They assert that there is a significant disparity between the scientific and professional communities' definition of workplace bullying and that to which employees relate.

There is also evidence of constructs that are similar to workplace bullying sharing similar characteristics, yet commentators may maintain sufficient differences to warrant a separate research debate. For example, Tepper (2000) refers to abusive supervision and draws upon examples of non-physical workplace aggression that may be defined as workplace bullying. In considering definitions, a critical review may be helpful to contextualise the meanings attributed to the term "bullying" and position those academic and popular terms associated with bullying in a literary and philosophical landscape.

Whilst Tepper appeared to appreciate the relationship abusive supervision may have with workplace bullying, there are also examples where the author may not appreciate or perceive that a relationship exists with another construct that is possibly allied to the phenomenon of workplace bullying. For example, Robinson

and Bennett (1995) discuss deviant workplace behaviours, (which they define as behaviours that deviate from the norm) and include a dimension in their model that encompasses interpersonal behaviours categorised as political deviance and personal aggression. Throughout their paper, however, there is no reference to bullying. In a more recent paper Warren (2003), investigating constructive and destructive deviance in organisations, also notably omits any comment on bullying. It may be argued therefore that such examples support the subjectivity and complexity associated with defining and compartmentalising workplace bullying. Simultaneously, it also seems apparent that workplace bullying could actually be subsumed in part or whole into other research debates where it may be less well understood as a phenomenon in its own right.

The evolution of workplace bullying research over the past ten to fifteen years suggests that a possible European and US divide is apparent in terms of defining and representing workplace bullying through the academic literature. This perception is implied by Keashly and Jagatic (2003 p.33) who tabulate selected definitions of workplace bullying. This is interesting because of what is referred to by them as the “labelling and definitional dilemma”; with the exception of one label and definition, none of the definitions and labels quoted actually specify the word ‘bullying.’ A similar situation is apparent when examining the table provided by Lutgen-Sandvik et al (2007) who provide a terminology and hierarchy of phenomena citing superordinate, subordinate, and general forms of work abuse only once using the word ‘bully’. This situation has also been identifiable in European investigations. Lewis (2004) suggests that whilst some behaviours that may be considered as bullying such as name calling and harassment are evident to subjects, they do not label them as bullying, rather seeing them as a by product of organisational or industry climate within which they are employed. Harassment, deviance, aggression, and abuse are examples of the words used by the American commentators cited by Keashly and Jagatic, (2003). Additionally, labels such as incivility, (Pearson and Porath 2005), generalized workplace aggression, (GWA), (Raver 2007), aggression, (Coombs and Holladay, 2004), and workplace violence, (Schat and Kelloway 2003), negative interpersonal behaviour or NiB, (Rayner, 2005), occupational violence,

(Mayhew et al 2004) and employee emotional abuse (EEA), (Lutgen-Sandvik 2003) all identify with workplace bullying to varying degrees.

Escartin's (2007) table provides a thorough theoretical synthesis of workplace aggressive behaviour, but seems to fall short of explaining the relationship between the many labels he has identified. There is an apparent absence of literature that explains why many of these labels have such an overlap between what appear to be differing, but seemingly allied, and maybe wider phenomena. Aquino and Lamertz (2004) refer to victimisation and explicitly state that their definition of victimisation subsumes terms such as bullying. This possibly implies that either bullying is a component part of a larger phenomenon or arguably that Aquino and Lamertz's position is flawed in that they perceive victimisation to be a dyadic construct whereas bullying is not and therefore it would be inappropriate to subsume it within their proposed definition.

It is argued here that this broad spread of labels, definitions, and contexts provides researchers with a richer environment in which to study the phenomenon of workplace bullying. This is because the variability of interpretations made by researchers and subjects alike in the course of exploring workplace bullying may give rise to new angles of understanding and creation of knowledge.

The variability of terminology is also evident in Europe. Possibly the most well discussed example of this is the use of the term "mobbing." Einarsen and Hoel (2005) explain that the term is simply the preferred word in Scandinavian countries whilst the word bullying is preferred in English speaking countries in Europe, the USA and Australia. It is apparent that those commentators who use the word mobbing in their research do not seem to differentiate its meaning to that of the word bullying, for example see Zapf et al (1996), Groeblichhoff and Becker (1996), Leymann and Gustafsson (1996), Niedl (1996), Zapf (1999) and Zapf and Gross (2001). One possible example is Shallcross et al (2008). They use the term mobbing to distinguish the behaviours associated with mobbing to be group related as opposed to the acts of an individual bully. The theoretical aspect of the definitions presented does therefore suggest that an important unit of analysis in workplace bullying is the use of language and meaning of it through the voices of

different people and the realities they perceive in bullying behaviours, episodes, and processes. Whilst this is welcomed by some commentators, (for example, see Liefvooghe and MacKenzie-Davy (2003)), it also means that commonality of understanding possibly remains a distant goal in the bullying research community.

As is often the case with emerging research debates, definitions remain in an evolutionary state for significant periods. This state of ambiguity and academic disagreement cannot lead the researcher to provide a less focused submission that might otherwise be the case. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to aim to fulfil two objectives in this thesis. First, the framings of definitions as others perceive bullying. The clear setting out of definitions that have been established or promulgated in academic literature provides reference points from which this thesis may draw. These reference points provide a vehicle for the second objective to be achieved; the researcher can reflect on these definitions in discussion and offer comment as to their appropriateness in the context of this work.

This notion does demand some consideration be given to the context of the work being studied and depending on the philosophical tradition of the writer, an understanding of the way in which the work was conducted. Salin (2001) cautions against comparing different studies on bullying precisely because some researchers have used different definitions. She cites studies that have defined bullying to the respondents and those studies that have not, (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996 and Einarsen and Raknes, 1997 respectively). Groeblichhoff and Becker, (1996) discuss the operationalisation of the definition coined by Leymann and elaborated upon by the international association against psychological stress and mobbing in 1993 who stated that:

“The mobbing actions should occur often, repeatedly and systematically, (statistically for at least half a year and once a week), within equal or unequal power structures, aimed at a certain person who experiences this as discrimination”, (p278).

This definition and proposed operationalisation of the theoretical construct of workplace bullying presents some clarity around mobbing, and has appeared recently seemingly reiterating its validity, (see Glaso et al, 2007). At this juncture there are a number of relevant questions that need to be asked to understand how these explanations may be utilised in this thesis; are instances of mobbing and bullying one and the same regardless of the definitions attributed to them as discussed above? Can a definition for workplace bullying be taken from the bullying of children in schools research school as is evident by Parkins et al (2006)? How does the definition offered by Groeblichhoff and Becker, with its origins evident in psychology complement the sociological debate that as previously stated is growing in stature? Does the bullying of children in schools, modelled on aggressive behaviour, have a place in the workplace bullying debate? How does the operationalisation of definitions formed in different languages translate? Is it feasible for the psychological and sociological interpretations of definitions to harmoniously co-exist? Is it appropriate for the approaches favoured by the qualitative and quantitative schools to use common definitions that implicitly evoke a common interpretation?

Leymann (1993) made a distinct difference in his explanation of the use of the word mobbing instead of bullying. Whilst his perspective appears to be unique to his work, there is apparent consensus that such terms as emotional abuse at work, (Keashley, 1998), workplace incivility, (Andersson and Pearson, 1999), mistreatment, (Spatlen, 1995) and horizontal violence, (Curtis et al, 2006) all refer to the same phenomenon commonly known as bullying in the UK and elsewhere. Parkins et al (2006) draw upon commonly held definitions and commentators' work from the bullying of children in schools research debate and create a discourse employing these outputs in their paper which is centred upon workplace bullying. Additionally, Parkins et al add that the literature and research surrounding discrimination and bullying suggests that perpetrators often exhibit similar behaviours and implicitly infer that the phenomena share characteristics and definitions. It is argued here that the debate over definition becomes more complex as new terms are introduced and bullying is juxtaposed with such phenomena as discrimination, (Parkins et al 2006), racism, (Lewis and Gunn 2007), abusive supervision (Tepper 2000), and escalated incivility (Namie 2003).

This is exacerbated when the challenge of multiple languages are considered. The complicated social nature of workplace bullying appears to have contributed to the difficulty in gaining consensus on a definition although a trend seems to be emerging from those who have developed the research thus far.

The literature counsels that time and frequency are key factors that determine whether bullying has taken place or not and uses these factors to distinguish bullying from conflict, which Leymann, (1990) argues are common in working life and are relatively harmless. Such a conclusion in what is arguably a relatively emergent and dynamic research subject seems a rather presumptuous statement. It implies that time is a necessary requirement from the psychological tradition to create a distinguishing and measurable feature that can then absolutely define a bullying episode. This requirement to quantify bullying through a measurement of concurrent factors presents this thesis with a dilemma. Is the positivistic nature of this approach, using batteries of questions, (for example, Leymann's LIPT, (Leymann, 1996), the Zerssen Complaint List, (1971), Einarsen and Raknes' Negative Acts Questionnaire, (1997), and the Instrument for Stress Oriented Job Analysis, (Zapf et al, 1999), appropriate in an environment where bullies and victims have constructed their own social reality which is subject to a myriad of variables and permutations?

Groeblinghoff and Becker, (1996, p279) state that quantitative methods may be adopted but must be used with caution as the [examiner] selects only the momentary subjective setting. Do the pre-defined boundaries set by survey instruments include and exclude certain episodes and behaviours? For example, Grubb et al (2005), in a survey in the USA, stated what bullying is and what incivility is prior to a survey exercise. In their commentary regarding the results they referred to organisational responses, such as '24.5% of companies reported some degree of bullying in the last year'. Is it feasible for a company to report bullying or is the phenomenon one that is inextricably linked with individuals, even though they may be acting in an organisational capacity? Interestingly, Grubb et al (2005) are clear in stating that despite their prescriptions in the survey, the research was limited as the respondents were key informants 'who may be disengaged from what is actually going on in the workplace'. Does the

positivistic nature of the psychological research tradition restrict the researchers' opportunity to gather data that has conditioned the subjects to conclude what bullying is through the parameters the researcher has set?

To illustrate possible shortcomings of the psychological research tradition, two examples can be considered. First Salin, (2001) offers that using lists of predefined negative acts introduces reliability factors because respondents do not have to judge whether they have been bullied or not. Whether or not the researcher can be sure the list is comprehensive or not remains an unaddressed question. Further, by stating particular acts, it is argued here that this is conditioning the respondent to those acts. Zapf, (1999) found that in cases where self judgement has been relied upon, cases of bullying were lower than where pre-defined lists were used. Importantly, Salin (2001) has shown that people may select items from a list that academics have determined constitute bullying. They tend to reply in the negative, however, when specifically asked if they have been bullied.

Second, Vartia's research instrument of 1996 opened by first stating a definition of bullying and moreover, stated what bullying was not. The closing sentence in the definition stated how the victim may feel. This method of research into a subject that is inherently a wholly subjective social interaction between two or more people is argued here to be too complex to be addressed using quantitative methods alone. This is because even if the researcher tries to frame their study in what they consider is a comprehensively considered situation, the assumption cannot be made that the respondent concurs with the researcher's interpretations. Additionally, given the variables that may be evident in any given scenario, the question of reliability and validity must be examined. Lewis, (1999) argues that much of the literature, confined by narrow research conditions, has resulted in many similar studies being undertaken, with each researcher trying to validate the work of others. The conventions set out in quantitative research methodology for determining reliability and validity is robust. Further, it is argued here, they impose constraints on the researcher possibly preventing them from considering the holistic landscape that stretches beyond the confines of their specific work, yet may impact the result. This in turn broadens the debate and the learning from it.

This assertion is apparent when reviewing the literature in attempting to draw out a definition. It is also apparent that Lewis's comments are also contextually relevant in that most research is focused on the victim, with researchers seemingly trying to validate each others' work in this regard. There is little published evidence that researches the bully. It is argued here that Western and European cultures find the notion of bullying socially unacceptable and as such it is not surprising that research on bullies is absent. Further, often bullies do not recognise themselves as such, (Rayner, 1998) and victims are unwilling to cite bullies by name in the proceedings that follow in some organisations, (Hoel, 2001). These shortcomings present difficulties in again trying to validate definitions. This is because the perpetrator is absent in the analysis that shapes the definition. This has meant that in defining bullying, an over emphasis has been placed on understanding the victim. This is a laudable and an appropriate endeavour, however it is far from comprehensive. For example, defining demographic criteria in bullying episodes is well documented, (see Olafsson and Johannsdottir, 2004, Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996 and Einarsen and Raknes, 1995 for example). Further, the organisational position or status of victims in organisations is also explained, (for example see Hoel et al, 2001). Psychological profiling of victims has also been extensively investigated to determine what employees are statistically most at risk of being bullied, (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2001).

The descriptive landscape of the victim has further been contextualised by studying those industrial sectors at most risk from mobbing or bullying, (Hubert and Veldhoven, 2001 and Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996). Their study provides many levels of detailed explanation as to who is the person being bullied. A clear view is provided as to who is most at risk. This is almost providing an identikit and series of signposts for researchers and practitioners alike to find the stereotypical victim of workplace bullying. This is an important process in the research journey to help researchers and practitioners develop their understanding of the phenomenon, providing practical interventions that prevent or address workplace bullying, and pursue the research debate.

The above contribution however falls short however in understanding why people label themselves as victims of bullying and what social construct led them to do so. Liefhooghe, (2001) is clear in explaining the value of a qualitative approach; he contests that the importance of the research of workplace bullying is to construct meaning rather than establish cause and effect. The interpretive philosophical approach is gaining currency and starting to be addressed by researchers. It appears that the subjective approach to the research was pioneered by Sjøtveit, (1992) who investigated the collectivism of workplace bullying. More recently, Lee, (2002) and Liefhooghe, (2001), take an interpretivist, and to an extent critical approach, using discursive analysis. The focus group method used by Liefhooghe goes some way towards an ethnographic approach to researching bullying, accepting that ethnography in its purest sense is unlikely to be a realistic approach to research as observation of bullying in the workplace is unfeasible, (Hoel and Beale, 2006).

This thesis argues that the subjectivity of these approaches leads to a greater level of emotion being apparent in the research. This is because the researcher is witnessing and experiencing people discussing or recounting episodes of workplace bullying. It is reasonable to suggest that this process leads the researcher to have been subjected to environments that describe workplace bullying in a way that, for example, a questionnaire cannot. Lee (2002) exhibits an ideology that makes claims that every oppressive act should be regarded as bullying. Whether this is possible or not seems not to be the important component, rather that there is a convergence of approaches emerging. For example, Hoel and Beale, (2006) conclude that a more multi-disciplinary approach would be beneficial in moving forward the analysis and the debate.

The Bully

Academic commentators are starting to build up a picture that aims to portray and define the bully. Consistency in their findings, however, remains uncertain and it is concluded that empirical conclusions cannot be drawn at this stage. As Rayner (1998) suggested, whilst much has been written about these people, few writers and researchers claim to have actually talked to any of them. Einarsen and Skogstad, (1996) for example in a large scale study concluded that over half those

bullied had been from a manager or supervisor. Other studies, (see Hoel and Cooper, 2000 for example) have concluded that the majority of bullies are management grade staff, accounting for over 75% according to victims' accounts. This clearly does not give one much to go on and certainly fails to complement the level of understanding we now have of the victim.

Zapf (2003) discusses the position of the bully and focuses the notion of status predominantly on organisational position. Zapf (2003) also cites Vartia and Hyyti (2002) who proffered the relationship between genders, downwards and peer bullying. Whilst these descriptors offer readers an objective representation of the bully, they seem to fall significantly short of providing a description that is of rich value in a social context. This desire for a more intricate picture of the bully may not be feasible.

Rayner (1999) correctly offers that a key point relating to methodology in workplace bullying research is access. She continues that it is not ethically possible to simulate the situation in a laboratory. It would be wholly unethical to simulate workplace bullying with individuals enacting the role of the bully to observe the effects of those being targeted. This sentiment cannot credibly be argued. It is evident that to gain such access would be very difficult and maybe unfeasible, and it seems that no research has been attempted using ethnography or action research methodologies.

Lewis (2004) encountered practical and ethical challenges in securing access in his qualitative research. This was achieved using third parties to communicate with the population who then self selected themselves as victims of workplace bullying. Given that this is the level of difficulty in identifying what is deemed to be reliable cases of victims of workplace bullying, it is unsurprising that there appears to be negligible research available that applies the same approach to the bully. Rayner and Cooper, (2003) draw parallels and analogies between black holes and bullies, commenting that they are both invisible and that we gather all our data on them from events that happen in a wider environment. They conclude that finding and studying the bully is like trying to study black holes – 'we are often chasing scattered debris of complex data and shadows of the past' (p.49).

The Organisational Context

One technique employed by researchers in an attempt to identify the bully has been to use the organisation as a vehicle to illustrate and represent the bully. Lewis (2002) offers a comprehensive table of what he calls “Work-based factors” associated with bullying. This proposition implies that the organisation and organisational context is a source of the bullying. Liefvooghe (2001) goes further citing employees who hold the notion of a “Pathologized organisation.” He argues that whilst victims hold an individual responsible for the bullying, they see the organisation as accountable. It seems feasible that the person holding the organisation accountable must be directing that perspective through another person. Why does Liefvooghe suggest that this person or persons is a proxy for the organisation as a whole?

Zapf, (1999) argues that aggressive leadership and organisational problems can statistically result in the organisation being the cause of mobbing. Leadership is also pursued by Skogstad et al (2007) who suggest that laissez faire leadership can lead to ambiguity in the organisation, which is an antecedent to bullying and as such, they conclude this leadership behaviour is also destructive. Vartia, (1996) argued that organisational climate is a source of bullying with such factors as anticipation of forthcoming change being a significant catalyst for bullying. Contrasting Zapf, Skogstad et al, and Vartia, it seems that leaders and managers are walking a tightrope. Overly zealous approaches are deemed aggressive whilst empowering, liberating approaches are seen as weak. This thesis argues that in any typical organisational sequence, (for example, a complete economic cycle), there may be few occasions that the leadership of the organisation could not be accused of in some way promoting workplace bullying. Whilst this is not condoning bullying behaviours and tactics to achieve organisational goals, researchers and practitioners alike should consider the context and setting, which may result in bullying occurring. As this thesis is a DBA, it seems appropriate that this position is raised as it may well be the reality of many managers and leaders in organisations.

This suggestion of the organisation being at the centre of the bullying debate raises some interesting points that are worthy of critical discussion. It is appropriate to understand an epistemology and ontology that accepts the notion that the organisation can manifest itself as a bully. This philosophical standpoint may be comfortable for the positivist researcher, however critical theorists, (see for example, Alvesson and Deetz, 1996), would possibly have a different perspective arguing that the organisation as classically defined in numerous management and organisational literatures, (for example, Mullins 1996) does not actually exist. This fundamental point in 'post-structural' and 'post-modern' theory suggests that an organisation cannot be a bully. This is because these philosophical traditions do not believe that an organisation exists as an entity. Rather they see organisations as complex collections of individuals. It may be beneficial to assess if labelling the organisation as a bully is possibly an easier way for researchers to define what a bully is, in the absence of the individual, or whether the organisation creates an environment sufficiently conducive to bullying to persuade people to behave in this way.

This theoretical assessment has significant shortcomings such as not considering macro social considerations, geography, and organisational culture. Vartia (1996) chooses her terms carefully discussing particular work climates that promote bullying rather than the organisation itself being seen as a bullying organisation. Pursuing this suggestion, the tenet that bullying is an interpersonal conflict seemingly has to be challenged; do organisational environments themselves contain or constitute interpersonal acts and if so how do these manifest themselves as a bullying episode?

The taxonomy of definitions has evolved to a point that probably now needs further development to create a more balanced debate. For example, the definitions of bullying have emerged from a relatively one sided debate discussing the victim. Whilst this has been complemented with commentary on reasons that induce, and how to prevent workplace bullying, (for example see Rayner, 1999, Resch and Schubinski, 1996, and Einarsen, 1999) which include organisational culture and the organisation, there is an imbalance when reviewing research about

the bully and to a lesser extent the causes of bullying. Furthermore and as discussed above, this taxonomy is grounded in psychology.

The appropriateness of this dominance must be questioned to understand if the framework for the definitions is being suppressed. The subtle implications in some of the psychological based literature, for example Zapf et al (1996) is that bullying is a homogenous construct with differentiated classifications within the 'walled garden' they have created. Liefhoghe and MacKenzie-Davy (2003) maintain there is no homogeneity. They state that participants in their research struggle with different interpretive frameworks in order to define and ascertain what is bullying.

Heames and Harvey (2006) in their theory-based paper examined the organisational, group and bullied victim relationships. Their conclusion posits that the outcomes of a bullying episode will affect the individual, group and victim in different ways but they will all be affected in a negative way. Is such a conclusion possibly too simplistic and presumptuous? Could the group actually be strengthened through successfully addressing the bullying episode? Could resolution of the bullying have brought clarity as to why certain behaviours were being exhibited by the perpetrator which has now been resolved? Whilst Heames and Harvey do not consider the impacts brought by third parties, it is possible to surmise that they too would contribute to the episode and would be affected by it through the apparent discourses. These research philosophy conflicts have potentially wider consequences beyond academic research and into organisations dealing with the realities of workplace bullying.

The implications for the practitioner should not be underestimated. Richards and Daley (2003) discuss the importance of bullying policy. Their commentary exhorts the value of good policy and the importance placed upon it by employees. Interestingly, even in a work environment where the policy is seemingly well communicated and desired, only 72% of employees would report bullying to their union representative. Maybe this statistic represents a worrying conundrum; what happens to the other 28%? The role that academics are seemingly playing in advising practitioners means that whilst the subject need not be over simplified,

frameworks appropriate to industry must be found to support the eradication of workplace bullying.

Chapter Summary

Chapter two has presented a history of the workplace bullying debate. It seems clear that the research has been influenced by the bullying in schools literature and is represented largely through a positivist lens. Evidence in more recent literatures suggests that interpretivist methodologies are contributing a valuable contrast, which this thesis argues are necessary for commentators to better understand the realities of workplace bullying through qualitative approaches. Where the organisation is alleged to be, for example, the antecedent to workplace bullying, how can the positivist agenda be complemented by the interpretivist one in a harmonious way that generates a more holistic comprehension of workplace bullying?

Nowhere is the contribution of the interpretivist school more required than in the ongoing definitional debate. Definitions and terminology appear to range from highly specific explanations, containing detailed classifications through to descriptions that could be regarded as so broad to have little meaning whatsoever. This situation where such discrepancy is apparent may not be ideal. Is it not the case however, that the research debate must be allowed to flourish and search for a greater understanding before a convergence in definitions becomes feasible and amenable to the wide range of commentators contributing to this argument? It seems the important aspect of the argument is to retain workplace bullying's identity and not to allow it to be subsumed into subjects that may encompass parts of this phenomenon.

Chapter two has provided a review of the literature encompassing the way workplace bullying is presented and represented by media and instruments such as Government agencies. Stepping back from the concentration of academic literature and considering one's own experiences, it seems reasonable to suggest that the myriad of messages from the media, whether press, television, internet or radio, is likely to have had some influence on all but a small minority of people in

the way in which they perceive workplace bullying. This is an important recognition in this thesis that underpins the philosophical position of the researcher; the social construction of workplace bullying affects how people define, experience, label, and report the phenomenon. These people extend beyond the target and perpetrator and include bystanders, family, friends, and the wide social networks that most people possess. This is important because in the interventions provided by the Acas helpline that will be discussed later, the way in which the caller and the advisor construct their own realities and understand each others is contested to be an important ingredient in addressing the central aim of this thesis.

Chapter three now resumes the literature review critically discussing bullying behaviours, reasons for workplace bullying, and the effects the phenomenon may have on people. This is an important component of this thesis as presenting these critical discussions provides foundations for the reasons why people call the Acas helpline about alleged cases of workplace bullying. For example, what bullying behaviours have been experienced by the caller? Does the caller believe they are being bullied because of a something particular? What has prompted them to call the Acas helpline? Addressing these issues through a literature review not only provides the necessary scholarly requirements for a doctoral thesis, it offers a contribution to understanding the role that the Acas helpline may be required to fulfil, thereby helping address the central aims of this thesis.

Chapter 3: Literature Review II

Chapter Overview

This chapter resumes the literature review with a number of specific aims. First, having established and critically explored the foundations of the workplace bullying literature, the review will move forward to critically examine bullying behaviours, the reasons, and consequences of bullying. These aspects of the workplace bullying research debate are clearly a prerequisite for a doctoral thesis to ensure that the literature review is comprehensive. Additionally as a DBA however, this chapter will approach the remainder of the literature review that contextualises workplace bullying with the role that the Acas helpline fulfils when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying. This is a valuable platform from which the remainder of the thesis can examine and address the aims of the thesis.

Bullying Behaviours

To address the points made in Chapter two, examining bullying behaviours may help us understand if and how the organisation can present itself as a bully and therefore help to contribute towards understanding and further evolving a definition of workplace bullying. Furthermore, consideration can then be given as to how organisational bullying reveals itself. First, however, it is useful to frame the notion of behaviour. Abercrombie et al (2000) suggest behaviourism, a school of psychology, deals with observable human behaviour and disregards subjective human activity, such as consciousness. They claim this theoretical construct is rejected by sociologists who use the term 'action' to distinguish meaningful actions from behaviour. Reber and Reber (2001) identify behaviour as a generic term covering acts, activities, responses, reactions, and movements. They conclude significant debate has taken place as to what constraints can and should be placed around the definition in order to give it legitimacy for scientific research. Fay (1996 p224) discusses behaviour from a social science perspective and focuses on the notion of understanding rather than judging, which he argues is the philosophical dilemma. Gummesson (2000) emphasizes the need for complementary data suggesting that empirical measured data is only of use if it

complements qualitative data used to understand the processes being studied. This thesis argues that such qualitative data can be obtained through interviews, which may be the most appropriate technique in many cases although the anthropological approach of ethnography through action research may be the most ideal to observe beyond what may possibly be considered behaviour by other philosophical schools. This short excursion into the differing theoretical constructs of behaviour is important. This is because there is a need to ensure the researcher and the reader appreciates the academic perspectives from which the work can be read and interpreted. The approach adopted here is one that sympathises more with the sociological approach than the psychological as this is arguably more in harmony with the methodology proposed in this thesis.

Bullying behaviour is described in the literature predominantly through the lens of positivism. This is evidenced by Lewis, (2002) and Zapf et al (2003) who tabulate the dominant behaviours found in bullying episodes drawn from previous research. These factors require some further analysis to determine how they manifest themselves in the form of human behaviours. Further, and at the same time, consideration has to be given to how one identifies the difference between bullying behaviour and the bullying process; what is their relationship? Does bullying behaviour result in a bullying episode? How is this defined and by whom? Is someone more likely to perceive another's behaviour as bullying if they are predisposed to do so?

Bullying behaviour has been the subject of much of the research that has been undertaken in the last ten years, (see Hoel et al, 2001 and Rayner and Cooper, 2003 for example). The literature is unclear in determining what behaviour means in this context. For example, some categorisations of bullying behaviour are relatively simple to explain and understand, (for example, persistent criticism, verbal abuse, social exclusion, or gossip and rumour) in Einarsen and Raknes' Negative Act Questionnaire, (1997). The subject of the behaviour and the manner in which the behaviour is exhibited would tend to meet the criteria and definitions discussed previously that constitute a bullying episode. However, considering another often cited behaviour that is alleged to constitute bullying, the withholding of information, (e.g., Einarsen and Raknes, 1995 and Hoel and

Cooper 2000), it is feasible that the personal interaction even though the bully is withholding information may be pleasant and courteous whilst the underlying objective may constitute a bullying episode. In this case is the behaviour itself bullying or is the act of withholding information part of the bullying process?

It is contested here that the only way of answering this question is to understand the meaning of the interaction through the eyes of the bully and bullied. This is equally unclear in the literature; chronological considerations have to be taken into account and an understanding of the bullying aim is probably of equal importance. As discussed, it is unlikely this could be established this and therefore this will not be explored further. Drawing on the literature, the matter can be pursued from the victim perspective. Numerous discussions focus on the notion of the relationship between time and bullying. Hoel et al (2001) allege that two thirds of victims are bullied for longer than one year, whilst Leymann's established claim (1996) is that for bullying to have occurred, the behaviour should have lasted for longer than 26 weeks. It is suggested here that a complex construction will be made by the victim as to the process they are experiencing. It is important to comment that the victim's and bully's interpretation of the process may be very different. Thus far, the bullying behaviours and processes have been assumed to have focused on dyadic relationships. Whilst the literature is often non-specific as to whether a group setting is apparent, commentators have specifically considered the notion of the group.

Coyne et al, (2003) have studied bullying behaviour in a group setting to understand not only the victim, but also dynamic of the group in terms of whether bullies and victims were considered part of the informal team using methods that place them in terms of status and workplace desirability. Using sociometry as a research technique, they claim to be able to identify bullies and victims. This is an interesting claim, but arguably of greater interest in this research is why they allege various people consider themselves or are considered by others as bullies and victims. For example, they claim that those most likely to be victims were popular and inside the informal group. This raises two particular questions. First, do they purport to be victims because they are conscious that this ensures their membership of the informal team or do they have membership because they are

victims? Similarly, and as discussed by them, are bullies rejected by the group because of their behaviour or do they behave as bullies because they have been rejected by the team? Second, this specific conclusion is contrary to the existing research, (see Einarsen, 2003 for example) in that victims are usually included in the group, and are not isolated in their organisational setting.

It is again argued that such questions as these, that demand an insight into individuals' construction of the situation they face, cannot necessarily be answered using generalisable comments. Coyne et al (2003), despite their positivist approach, recognise this dilemma and discuss the issue taking an interpretivist perspective. They question whether bullying is actually a group socialisation process where bullying is the norm; is it better for the victim to accept the bullying and become a part of the group than act against it and risk rejection? This insightful comment is one that illustrates the complexity of the subject and the limitation of quantitative research in the field. It urges us to contrast the behaviour with the values and assumptions of the individual. This is important and necessary because consideration has to be made between the organisation, group, and individual behaviour and in the case of the latter, the construction of social reality they have built in terms of the localised transactions they experience that might then become constituted as bullying. Further, this research fails to mention or acknowledge the existence and impact of horizontal bullying or upwards bullying to senior people in the organisational context.

Upwards bullying is a relatively new addition to the research debate. At present, there seems to be little literature. Hoel, Cooper and Faragher's study, (2001) found that a small proportion of managers were bullied by subordinates and explained this by citing Aquino and Bradfield, (2000) who maintained that this was because of the superiors ability to control reward and retribution. Branch et al (2007) argues that managers may be bullied because of their position as 'out group' members, who are effectively isolated in the organisational context. Are third parties possibly a more likely route for managers to seek support than via internal sources given what may be considered an embarrassing position in which to find themselves? Zapf et al (2003) tabulate the findings of research around the organisational status of bullies. The evidence provided clearly shows that the

majority of bullying takes place from a position that is senior in the organisational structure. At a higher level, this description may be better explained by using the power theories. The word power and the illegitimate use of it has been used in definitions of bullying, (Coyne, Craig and Chong, 2004) and it is argued here is a powerful component in explaining bullying behaviour.

Power

Liefooghe and MacKenzie-Davy (2001) maintain that management requires the exercising of power and by its nature promotes tyranny of varying degrees of subtlety. They appear to have taken such an arguably extreme critical theorist view from Alvesson and Deetz, (1996) and Mumby and Stohl, (1996) who present an opportunity to challenge and understand what power means in the bullying discourse and how this relates to the literature on power. Power is defined in many ways in the literature, although a commonly held definition by many commentators was first introduced by French and Raven in 1959 who, cited in Fiol et al, (2001) state that power is the ability or potential to influence.

Clearly in the context of workplace bullying, this definition falls short of the negative and destructive impacts the illegitimate use of power brings, but it does provide a point of reference to contrast power through the lens of workplace bullying. Salin (2003) and Verdasca (2007) suggests that in the context of workplace bullying, dimensions of power within organisational politics are potentially related to workplace bullying where the perpetrator makes a rational choice to improve her/his position by sabotaging the performance of others. Whilst this review of literature is not primarily concerned with an inquiry into power, it is apparent that power itself cannot be overlooked and some contextualisation is required. Einarsen et al (2003, p.21) are clear in their statement that power disparity is central to the definition of bullying.

The literature on power is well established, especially on the consequences and antecedents of power, factors which may relate to workplace bullying. The aim of taking a selective journey into the literature on power is to illustrate theoretical constructs and relate them to workplace bullying through a brief critical review.

Furthermore, are there clues in the power literatures that may contribute to understanding the benefit or role of involving a third party for intervention?

Power has been related with influence and knowledge for hundreds of years and much of what has been written in recent times emanates from the work of Foucault, (see Fillingham, 1993 for example). Foucault's tenet that power is a mental force exerted by a minority to impose their will on a majority has been used by many, (e.g., House, 1988 and Pfeffer, 1981) to explain how people "get things done," (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993). This may apply in cases of workplace bullying. Whether the bully, however, is attempting to "get a thing done" that is legitimate is largely irrelevant and should not be condoned as acceptable.

The point of importance here is that bullies are using their influence to impose their will on their victim in a manner that constitutes an illegitimate use of power. The context of illegitimacy is also important. In the event of peer bullying, the illegitimacy is manifested in a more subtle context, and not a hierarchical one associated with downward bullying.

Another significant point in the relationship between workplace bullying and power theory emerges here. Foucault also maintained that power was not a repressive force, especially when used to construct knowledge, (Burr, 2003). Using this Foucauldian principle, it is argued here that the bully may use a bullying episode to manipulate knowledge to her/his benefit. The consequence of the bully's behaviour may be of little interest to the bully as regardless, the episode is likely to end in some form of conflict.

Sportsman (2005) asserts that all conflicts are based on attempts to protect participants self esteem or change perceived inequities in power because most participants believe that the other person has greater power in the situation. This assertion resonates with workplace bullying as it is essentially a social phenomenon. Pfeffer and Fong, (2005) argue that the social influence that arises through the use of power is inextricably linked to the mature notion of self enhancement; the idea that actors have an inherent desire for their outcome actions to be seen in a positive light (Heider, 1958 and James 1907). This implies

that the bully may see the way that she/he uses her/his power as a means of creating favourable impressions upon themselves through the victimising influencing of others. The literature appears blurred as to who may hold this favourable impression and in the context of bullying there appears to be an absence of literature that offers a contribution in this area that may explain if this theory could be a cause of workplace bullying.

Heames et al (2006) however offer some direction that appears to be useful. They contest that status inconsistency is an antecedent to workplace bullying drawing upon status construction theory, where pressure exists to 'be like' others in a group. They describe status inconsistency as a lack of congruence between two or more individuals. The lack of congruence is a theme that is also adopted by Ashforth (1994) who used the term 'petty tyrant' or 'petty tyranny' to describe someone who uses power and authority oppressively, capriciously, and vindictively. In short, Ashforth concludes, 'someone who lords their power over others'.

Whilst Heames et al (2006) avoid the term 'power', preferring such language as 'social stratification', 'social ranking' and 'pecking orders', there seems to be a clear relationship with power theory in their work albeit in an indirect way as they explore the social construction of organisational life. Where such a formal or informal social system exists, does this make it more difficult for a target of alleged workplace bullying to use resources for support that are inherently a part of that same social system? Could it be that in cases like this, a third party provides an independent voice whose support is not seen as being influenced? Acas may be seen as such a vehicle by callers to the helpline who recognise that Acas does not hold power in the workplace bullying discourse they are experiencing.

Fiol et al, (2001) identify power as a fluid social construction in organisations subject to multiple interpretations. Their article details the forces and conditions necessary for effective power transfer across a group and individuals. The point of relevance in their work to this literature review is to consider their research from a position of ineffective power transfer. Whilst this avenue of inquiry will

not be explored further here, it is of relevance in considering how and why behaviours may become constructive or destructive and how, as Fiol et al posit, power can result in behaviours that confirm expectations through selective attention. Such theories as the two discussed above may offer a signpost that provides some clues as to why bullying occurs in workplaces.

Reasons for Workplace Bullying

The existing body of workplace bullying research provides a number of clues as to the reasons for bullying in the workplace. Some of these are very broad and leave the reader possibly wanting a little more. For example, Einarsen et al (2003 p23, fig 1.2) cite cultural and socio-economical factors in their theoretical framework for the study and management of bullying at work. Einarsen (1999) cited by O'Moore (2003, p.91) also claims it is unlikely that bullying may be explained exclusively in terms of work conditions and social environment and adds that workplace bullying may well occur through environmental effects on negative behaviour. Pearson et al (2000) suggest that participants in their research cited the increasing use of technology such as email reduced face to face interpersonal interactions that led to spiralling incivility. Whilst this thesis does not critically challenge these suppositions, it is posited here that they may be somewhat too all encompassing to be of practical use to an academic or practitioner.

Leymann, (1993) maintains that there are three phases to what he refers as the "mobbing process." First, the emergence of an unresolved conflict, that whilst visible between people, becomes a catalyst or arguably a reason for the bullying to start. This stage is followed by the second whereby the conflict itself recedes, although still apparent, and the issue become centred on those involved within the dyadic or group setting. Finally, the third stage involves the group or departmental borders being crossed, (Resch and Schubinski 1996) and official intervention takes place.

This narrative implies a scenario that is socially constructed by people in an isolated environment; it is of the bully's making and her/his choice that the episode will take place. Vartia, (1996) pursues this debate and notes that reasons

for bullying were status of the individual, job, personality, and personal competition. Her exploratory research showed that envy, a weak superior, and competition for favour and being different from the rest of the group were the main reasons cited by victims as to why they had been bullied.

Also in 1993, Leymann quoted four factors that tend to be prominent in workplace bullying research. These are deficiencies in work design; deficiencies in leadership behaviour; a socially exposed position of the victim and a low moral standard in the department. Felson and Tedeschi, (1993), cited in Einarsen, (1999) determined that the reasons for bullying may be predatory or dispute related with some mixed cases containing both factors. This interpretation may also be read into Sjøtveit's work (1992), (Hoel and Beale, 2006) where they talk of workers' collectives. In this, they argue that bullying may occur when an individual violates the collective norms. These findings, which appear to be centred on the individual as the source of bullying, appear to be the only peer reviewed research examples and even in these cases the notion of the organisation being an inherent part of the source of the reason for bullying is apparent if not indirectly evident in the cases discussed.

These early findings provide us with a number of key questions that commentators have to a greater or lesser extent addressed over the past 10-15 years. Arguably, one of the more important questions is what role does the organisation play in terms of the causes and reasons for bullying? What characteristics of the organisation influence the likelihood of bullying being prevalent within it and why? If these aspects can be identified, then it follows that the research agenda should follow asking what organisation design can be both theorised and practiced in order to mitigate the instances of bullying, although such aspirations at a practitioner and academic level may be utopian.

Interestingly, Heames and Harvey (2006) argue that the dyadic relationship between two individuals in a bullying scenario may escalate up the organisation and reverberate at a group level and conclude calling for more research in this area. This infers that the research debate is suggesting the organisation may be structured in a way that is conducive for bullying to take place and that dyadic

instances of bullying may affect the organisation's norms and be a cause of bullying. Whether or not an organisation can be structured to negate or at least mitigate the risk of bullying through status inconsistency in a dyadic relationship is debatable.

Heames et al (2006) cite Goffman (1959) stating that organisational life is socially constructed and structured around implicit and explicit hierarchies and status ranking. This apt and arguably accurate interpretation of organisational life would seem to suggest that status inconsistency theory (for example, see Hatfield et al, 1982, and Whitt, 1983) could be cited as an antecedent to workplace bullying. To eliminate workplace bullying, one may first have to address status inconsistency which inevitably presents itself in organisations as pressures mount on managers to meet ever more challenging targets.

Capitalist societies are in crisis, (Sheehan, 1999) and in order to maintain corporate earnings, organisational re-structuring has resulted in managers perceiving they have the mandate to use whatever techniques are necessary in the deployment of their human resources to meet the business need, which in turn may proliferate workplace bullying, (Baillien and Matthiesen 2007, and Lewis and Sheehan 2003). Does this imply that 21st century capitalist economic pressures and the constant state of change in organisational life are promulgating workplace bullying? Hutchinson et al (2005) argue that organisational change is a legitimized vehicle for workplace bullying where bullies are able to co-opt organisational processes with the intention of harming their targets. Sheehan (1999) adds that managers, under increasing pressure, to delay and downsize, are being further pressured with many functions, for example, industrial relations and human resource management (HRM) being devolved to the workplace level. This, Sheehan suggests, citing McCarthy, (1995) means managers might, albeit sometimes involuntarily, adopt bullying tactics. Sheehan's paper provides many useful signposts as to how organisations are implicitly involved in workplace bullying. One of the most visible and possible indicators in this regard is the role and concept of HRM.

Organisational Considerations

What relationship may exist between HRM and workplace bullying? A major managerial lexicon of the 1980s and 1990s and arguably into the 21st century, HRM is too big a topic to comprehensively review even only in the context of bullying. This is therefore not the intent of this section of the chapter. The aim is to examine if the HR prescriptions and texts, many of which originated from the USA from the 1970s, have contributed to a changing organisational landscape that has become more conducive to bullying. If this is the case, are there identifiable factors that can be explained or understood in the context of intervention?

HRM has struggled to find defining characteristics, (Beardwell and Holden, 1997, p12), with ambivalence over the definition, terms and scope, (p13). They conclude that for every element that defines HRM, there are arguments from non-HRM espousing organisations that they may successfully practice such elements; for every academic construct, there is seemingly little consensus and generalised agreement. Mullins (1996) in his enduring and popular undergraduate and MBA text concludes there is no clear distinction and he champions the role of personnel management by referring to the function as such. What is interesting about his stance is that the underlying philosophies he states as important to embrace in personnel management appear to be common to many of those cited in HRM texts. There is however one notable absence of emphasis.

Horwitz (1991) crafts a detailed and useful description of HRM and how it is different from personnel management. He notes that HRM is an ideological motivation that seeks to deliver organisational goals. Furthermore and possibly of most significance and importance is that HRM differs from personnel management because it focuses on the individual not the collective. Legge (1989) develops this argument by adding what may be an important ingredient in the context of bullying; HRM is integrated, inherent, and implicitly practiced within line management, whereas personnel management holds that the specialist role of people management resides as a peer function alongside line management. This means that the development of the organisation, and therefore by definition, the people within it, the implementation of initiatives and the consequences that arise from them is in the gift of the line manager as the accountable person. If this is

held to be the reality in organisations, how does intervention take place when conflict arises either between managers and their subordinates or within a dysfunctional team, for example, where the manager is unable to resolve issues that may arise?

Lewis and Rayner (2003) take up this question and take a critical approach to the relationship of HRM with workplace bullying. They contest that the principles of HRM provide a potential breeding ground for workplace bullying activities that may go unchallenged. This presents what is possibly an important ethical argument in the workplace bullying debate. Lewis and Rayner postulate that the moral pillars of workplace ethics and justice are potentially compromised by HRM. The ideology of HRM in the line management function arguably removes the ability for the employee stakeholders to engage the organisation when non-ethical activities take place. This supposition has important resonance with this thesis. Are Lewis and Rayner alleging that the employee is starved of opportunity to convey messages to managers? Would such a situation mean that conflicts such as workplace bullying would go unaddressed? This is not entirely clear. If one were to assume to some extent that such circumstances were feasible, then such an assumption may signpost a possible role for third party intervention.

It seems apparent from Lewis and Rayner that they believe HRM now finds itself at a moralistic crossroads between the ideology of winning hearts and minds and the functional need for ethical governance. Such a crossroads may heighten the current academic debate as organisations may find themselves under greater scrutiny than during the past twenty years as they wrestle between shareholder/stakeholder return and workplace justice.

Gokcel and Ertureten (2007) take a more extreme view postulating that employees perceive the HR department is responsible for bullying problems in the workplace based on their research that included a study to determine the belief people had in the HR department's competence in supporting victims of workplace bullying. Gokcel and Ertureten (2007) conclude HR departments should exercise caution in intervening in issues of workplace bullying. If Gokcel and Ertureten's findings

can be generalised, then the role of third party intervention may become even more significantly important than organisations may have previously perceived.

McCarthy et al (1995) allege that the uncertainty facing the corporate world has led to an emergence of a discourse of restructuring, with one possible outcome within this discourse is workplace bullying, (Sheehan 1999). Have the times that Sheehan and McCarthy refer to been superseded by a changing economic climate and political landscape seen in the first decade of the 21st century? Is it feasible that changes in the world's corporate circumstances would be likely to impact workplace bullying? As far back as 1976, Brodsky asserted that bullying may be an institutionalised component of the organisation, sometimes in the guise of firm and fair management that easily becomes harsh and unfair, (Einarsen et al 2003).

Keashly and Jagatic (2003) discuss the way in which the organisation's culture, arguably impinged upon by the competitive necessity to survive, can create a norm of harassment as justifiable because it is perceived as a functional attribute required in order to promote productivity. Pearson et al (2000) argue that a decrease in respect from the organisation may be interpreted by employees as organisational incivility and promulgates incivility from employees towards one another. Salin (2003) proffers that reward structures associated with performance measures result in victimisation and intimidation becoming almost unavoidable. Salin (2003), citing Lee (2000) adds that such schemes as performance related pay virtually institutionalise the practice of workplace bullying and provide the means for its perpetuation, concluding that workplace bullying may actually be a competitive strategy in some organisations.

Are Keashly and Jagatic, Pearson and Salin alleging that in effect workplace bullying is almost a cultural norm in organisations? The business like approach now evident in both the public and voluntary sectors seems to require all types of industry to adopt some form of competitive operating model. The assertions all three authors seem to collectively imply is that a business model founded on competitive advantage, and commercial discipline, coupled with financial reward could be a near certain recipe to induce workplace bullying. This argument seems to be flawed.

Whilst there may be cases of mismanagement and inappropriate behaviour to achieve targets, recent research in the UK suggests some 5.4% of people are bullied in the workplace, (Grainger and Fitzner, 2007). With 59% of jobs in the UK having performance related pay as part of the remuneration set to continue to increase, (Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD), 2007), this alone would suggest that there is possibly more work required to assess the relationship between workplace bullying and some HRM practices that promote organisational cultures characterised by high performance and competitiveness.

Liefooghe and Olafsson (1999) argue that bullying is experienced by a culture as well as a bully or a victim, and citing Archer (1999) claim that people possibly blame bullying on the culture. This culturally centred argument is identifiable in Vartia's work (1996). Where the organisation's social climate is deemed as being a good atmosphere, there is a correlation with an absence of bullying. The correlation statements made by Vartia may be open to significant challenge 12 years on since this work was published.

Archer (1999) investigated culture in UK Fire Brigades and found that culture played a large part in understanding some of the discourses of workplace bullying. He contends this is because the culture of organisations affects the behaviour of individuals. Therefore, he advocates the need to change the culture of the organisation in order to stem the maintenance and tradition of the anti-social behaviour that is so endemic it is not seen by many perpetrators as bullying.

Vartia and Archer's work do offer one signpost in that organisational culture may offer some direction as to what factors contribute to a poor organisational climate which in turn could be the foundation of eliciting poor interpersonal relationships that become connected with bullying. If culturally, the organisation is predisposed to accepting workplace bullying, where does a target of a bullying episode turn? It seems possible that the Acas helpline could provide a source of support for those employees in such a situation.

What facets associated with HRM may have links to workplace bullying? Empowerment forms the backbone of many approaches to organisational change, (Hickman 1998 and Yagil and Gal, 2002). Empowerment is established when an individual feels accountable for the work or results they have to deliver, (Nohria, et al 1992). Yukl (2002) discusses empowerment and highlights some potentially disturbing traits possibly related to materialistic reward as bonuses and promotions. These include greater persistence when facing obstacles and employee conflict.

Such traits appear to be more applicable to the middle manager, who seems to be trapped between a senior leadership team offering empowerment, arguably via a prescriptive method. This in itself is contrary to the definitions offered in numerous recent texts, (see Matthieu et al, 2006, Ahearne et al, 2005, and Ben-Zur and Yagil, 2005) which discuss the merits of the recipient warmly embracing empowerment with a sense of fulfilment and control. Is it the sense of control and accountability, linked with the need to deliver that may lead the manager to use whatever means are necessary to achieve this aim? Could these means include bullying? Such linkages and conclusions are difficult to determine through objective measurement however, the increasingly respected qualitative techniques being used in workplace bullying are allowing researchers to reveal some possibilities that may be valuable in this area.

Liefooghe and MacKenzie-Davey (2001) show that managers manage their teams to achieve targets they have been set. Likely to be empowered and accountable for their own performance targets, the manager could use bullying tactics to ensure their teams achieve them. Employees are possibly subjected to ongoing informal and petty consequences if targets are missed and associate these treatments with bullying through the organisation's leadership.

If people are being bullied by their managers, who in turn is working towards targets set by the organisation, and where do managers turn to for support? It seems likely that representatives in the organisation, such as the HR function will be torn between the organisation's goals and ethical best practice. Based on Gokcel and Ertureten (2007), it would seem that the HR function would be a futile

source of support. Is this an example of the circumstances and potential consequences that lead people to call the Acas helpline? If so, does this situation provide clues as to what role the helpline advisor may play in such an intervention when seemingly there is no trust in the employee/employer relationship?

Implicit within the notions of trust, empowerment, and quality of working life the presence of the Psychological Contract is apparent. The Psychological Contract is defined by Sims (1994) as the set of expectations held by the individual employee that specify what the individual and the organisation expect to give to receive from each other in the course of their work relationship. The important point in this definition is the notion of individualism. It is argued here that this utopian focus on the individual negates the need for the traditional collective representation of trades' unionism, removes the need for overly bureaucratic and formalised procedures for dealing with people matters in organisations instead favouring a unitary model of representation. It is argued here that the Psychological Contract is a contributor to the possible moral breakdown in the ideology promulgated by Lewis and Rayner (2003) and importantly and with relevance to this thesis, it may attempt to mask the need for interventionist strategies that support the employee. Serantes and Suarez (2006) draw upon numerous critical reviews of the Psychological Contract and infer that such implicit contractual conditions assume violence as an inevitable consequence in the workplace. This extreme perspective is argued to promote responses in a bi-directional manner that in turn may be a catalyst for workplace bullying.

The Effects and Consequences of Bullying

The effects of bullying have been studied in numerous research exercises, (see Meglich-Sespico et al, 2007, Hoel and Faragher, 2004, Lewis, 2004, and Zapf et al, 1996, for examples), although the lack of longitudinal studies means that the findings are somewhat limited in their use. In order to provide a holistic review of the effects and consequences, it is necessary to consider such effects and consequences from three perspectives.

First and most well documented is the effect to the victim. There is a significant body of research documenting the effects of bullying on victims. Zapf et al

(1996) conclude that mobbing is an extreme subset of social stressors. Wilson (1991) claims that bullying is more devastating than all other work related stress factors put together in the case of his US studies, although this is a relatively dated piece of research. McCormack et al (2007) suggest that a positive relationship between superior and co-workers fails to compensate or counter the negative effects of bullying. The majority of research into the effects of bullying on victims is psychological and/or clinically based, with statistical research having followed the pioneering work of Leymann. (For examples see, Sa and Fleming, (2008), Rospenda et al (2005), Tehrani (2004), Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001), Niedl (1996), Zapf, Knorz and Kulla (1996), and Leymann and Gustafsson (1996). Keashly and Jagatic (2003) and Keashly (1998) have summarised succinctly the categories, effects, and sources of research in table format. From these tables and other evidence, there are themes and groupings that become apparent.

Petri (1998) cites Leymann (1990) who concluded that there were four main sets of effects. It is interesting that 17 years after this work was published, there has been a consistent consensus with these findings although the diversity of the research has grown significantly. This possibly means that a consistent correlation exists in terms of the effects of bullying despite differences in many other variables that may occur. Social isolation was Leymann's first grouping. This characteristic has been researched from two perspectives; where the victim does not fit in the group and is bullied because of this, thereby exacerbating the original social problem, (Archer, 1999) and second where the victim has become socially isolated due to bullying, (Tehrani, 2002). A third approach to this phenomenon has been promulgated by Archer (1999) who maintains that the fear of social isolation is greater than the fear of bullying and accordingly the victim tolerates the bullying as a form of perverse preference. Hoel and Cooper (2000) refer to social isolation through the medium of absenteeism. Sa and Fleming (2008) continue this theme of isolation, citing irritation, burnout, bad humour, exhaustion leading to 'de-personalisation', which results in somatic symptoms, such as depression, insomnia and social dysfunction.

Djurkovic et al (2006) identify with the psychosomatic hypothesis. The focus of their paper is to establish the role of neuroticism in the psychosomatic model of workplace bullying. Their research establishes that the effects of workplace bullying are not moderated by neuroticism but that the effects of workplace bullying are greater than the effects of neuroticism. The relationship between the person's personality and the propensity to be bullied has been researched by Glaso et al (2007) who conclude that personality, levels of anxiety and neuroticism do play a part in the likelihood for an individual to be bullied, although the nature of the relationship between personality and bullying appears to remain less than fully explained at this stage of the research debate. Agervold and Mikkelsen (2004) found that employees in poor working environments lead to an increased propensity to be bullied and heightened stress-related, anxiety based and mental health symptoms. Glaso et al (2007), drawing on Agervold and Mikkelsen (2004) and Moayed et al (2006), assert that workplace factors and individual personality were associated with instances of workplace bullying.

In an attempt to define more clearly the personality definitions of targets of workplace bullying, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001) concluded from their results that people with elevated personality profiles, including indications of severe psychological disturbance and psychosomatic troubles were more likely to be bullied. They caution strongly, however, that the association between personality and bullying is very complex and assumptions should not be made without the appropriate analysis from clinicians. Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001) also comment on Zapf (1999) who identified a group of victims who he concluded required urgent psychiatric treatment. Interestingly, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001) commenting on Zapf's findings posit that this sub group of victims probably suffered from such ailments as anxiety and depression before they were bullied. This is an important and relevant observation. Do such conditions as depression make people more predisposed to workplace bullying or does the workplace bullying contribute to the condition, possibly even causing it? Whilst this thesis will not attempt to identify or comment on causal links between mental illness and bullying, it is a considerable area of concern in the workplace bullying research debate and particularly when considering what may be an appropriate intervention to support the victim in a workplace bullying discourse. Nielsen et al

(2008) have contributed to developing the research around targets of workplace bullying examining sense of coherence, (SOC). SOC is described by Nielsen et al (2008), drawing on Eriksson and Lindstrom (2005) as the individual's global orientation which allows them to view the world as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. Nielsen et al (2008) claim that people with a higher SOC are less likely to be susceptible to post traumatic stress.

Mental disorders such as those cited above are clearly highly complex and have been associated with chronic psychiatric diseases such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), (see Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996). Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004) surveyed 102 victims of workplace bullying and found very high levels of PTSD symptoms in the results. They urge the results to be used with caution in that whilst the self reporting in the results suggests incidence of PTSD, there was no clinical diagnosis.

This lack of clinical diagnosis and employment of a questionnaire to establish cases of PTSD is defended by Tehrani (2004) who notes that questionnaires are often used to test for mental health conditions, therefore implying that self labelling from the victim's construct of reality is a respected and accepted component of this positivist psychological technique. It is interesting to note that Lutgen-Sandvik et al (2007) claim that from their recent research, self labelling in the context of workplace bullying is an area that needs significantly more research. They claim that based on an operational definition 25% of their respondents were bullied at work, however only one third of this group self identified as being bullied. Ludgen-Sandvik et al (2007) concluded that people do not necessarily equate negativity with bullying.

Tehrani (2004) concludes the levels of PTSD incidence in her results appear to be very high. Further examination, however, found the results to be more complex than originally believed. Tehrani concludes this is because of the characteristics of workplace bullying. One particular postulation from Tehrani is that if the bullying period is prolonged, then the victim adopts a 'learned hopelessness'. It seems that research into the long terms effects of workplace bullying and PTSD remains in its formative stage.

This thesis argues that to understand such constructs as 'learned hopelessness' longitudinal data from childhood to adult is required. Additionally, it is probable that a greater understanding is needed into the role of personality and the likelihood of being bullied. Could someone be bullied because of her or his personality or could their personality make them sensitive to feeling they are being bullied? There are two particular reasons for this assertion that are especially relevant to this thesis.

First, researchers, clinicians, line managers, and HR professionals would benefit from understanding better the relationship between personality and being subjected to bullying. It is possibly impractical to suggest that generalisable causation can be stated in an empirical manner. However, it is interesting that the research thus far does not seem to be able to comment on whether ailments such as depression and stress are caused by bullying, aroused by bullying or is an existing condition simply made worse.

Second, when considering the role of intervention especially from a third party, who may be detached from the bullying situation, an understanding of the mental health implications of their advice seems to be a vital prerequisite in the approach they adopt. Observations from Tehrani (2004) and Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004) and implicitly from Hoel and Cooper (2000) infers that clinical expertise may well be a mandatory requirement in the treatment of those bullied in the workplace.

The loss of coping resources in the context of the social-psychological paradigm was also cited by Leymann. Coping with bullying is an effect in itself as it only arises as a consequence of the action and comparatively little research has been conducted to investigate it, (see Zapf and Gross 2001, Hogh and Dofradottir 2001 and Olafsson and Johannsdottir 2004 for examples). Coping with and understanding the process of bullying is a complex area in itself. Hogh and Dofradottir (2001), for example ask whether coping is process or style centric. The research available appears to favour attempting to understand what victims do in order to cope and there seems to be a deficit in focusing on why they behave

and act in the way they do and how these results manifest themselves. Lee and Brotheridge (2006) conclude that coping responses generally result in burnout, (Einarsen et al 1998) and often symptoms of ill health.

Lee and Brotheridge (2006) take a different approach to understanding coping mechanisms. They comment on the contingency approach to coping where they assert that the coping response will be congruent with the bullying behaviour. Their method leads to the reader having to consider whether outward explicit bullying, (for example being shouted at), is preferable to psychological bullying. This is because the coping mechanism used during explicit outward bullying such as shouting at someone will prompt a similar retaliatory response. This is a debatable assumption in a power structure where the perpetrator or bully is dominant over the target. Could the Acas helpline be used by the target as a means of venting their frustration? In cases of horizontal bullying, this perspective may be valuable to consider.

Probably the most revealing aspect of Lee and Brotheridge's work is their postulation that being bullied may lead to counter- aggressive behaviour. Citing Pearson and Porath (2001), they conclude that the bullied party may retaliate towards the bully to re-establish the power balance and 'seize back the ground' that they may have lost in the previous bullying episode. This standpoint is another relevant perspective to consider when dealing with an intervention into a case of workplace bullying.

First, it seems appropriate to ensure that the advice does not catalyse counter-bullying behaviour as this may spawn multiple cases of bullying. For example, bullying does not only affect the victim, others in the discourse become involved, (Lewis 2002). If these people and the victim adopted a counter-bully campaign, then it may be that the original perpetrator becomes the victim of a mobbing campaign, mobilised by people seeking some form of workplace justice. This quasi-vigilante approach with 'Robin Hood-esqe' undertones could possibly be devastating in an organisation where organisational civil rule would be undermined.

Second, the theory suggested by Lee and Brotheridge (2006) seems to imply that support for those accused of bullying may be more complex than is currently perceived. For example, if the bully has adopted this behavioural stance due to being bullied themselves, then it suggests that there may be a more endemic and institutionalised situation in the organisation. Whilst the boundaries of this thesis do not extend to address in detail the above comments and questions more comprehensively, it is reasonable to suggest that the life cycle of bullying is complex and cannot be taken at face value.

White (2004) adopts a psychodynamic approach in attempting to understand the life cycle process of workplace bullying. Psychoanalysis as a research technique in workplace bullying appears to be rare. Psychoanalysis concerns itself with the study of unconscious processes. White's highly complex interpretive approach contests that when boundaries are broken, individuals become containers for each others' feelings. The notion of boundaries refers to one's unseen and immeasurable barriers that separate individuals from each other. White maintains that the strength of these boundaries are formed in the early years of life. The notion of containment represents the idea that one can compartmentalise or contain feelings. The basis of her ensuing argument is that bullies 'bully' because they are unable to contain feelings previously experienced and therefore they find a subject to be the container for these feelings. The subject, White contests, has weak boundaries due to a weak sense of self.

Lewis (2004) purports that shame is one way in which victims react and arguably cope with bullying. His research studied the phenomenon of shame in relation to being bullied in the workplace using a qualitative method through unstructured interviews where respondents were allowed to develop their responses using their own frames of reference. Contributions such as Lewis's are valuable in balancing the research agenda to create varying "types" of knowledge to progress the agenda.

Ferris (2004) studied the approach of employee representatives in instances of coping with workplace bullying. Ferris's preliminary typology of *see no evil hear no evil* and *speak no evil* can be interpreted as those who dismiss the problem of

workplace bullying altogether, those who observe that workplace bullying has taken place but dismiss the event(s) out of hand and those who recognised the problem respectively. Ferris concludes that the use of employee representatives providing support for subjects coping with workplace bullying may well be a misplaced strategy. Whilst she does not make alternative recommendations, this thesis suggests that Ferris's findings offer another signpost that may help understand the role of the Acas helpline.

It appears that there is little qualitative research exploring the coping strategies employed by victims and this could be a vacuum in the body of knowledge to date. Zapf and Gross (2001) take their lead in investigating coping strategies from the school of conflict management, (see for example, Barki and Hartwick, 2004, Bell and Song, 2005, and Sportsman, 2005) where they appear to implicitly link escalated conflict and workplace bullying. They contest that the majority of conflicts in organisations are solved, taking up to as much as 20% of a manager's time, however they suggest that those that are not solved spiral into bullying. Such a notion seems to be a feasible assumption. Numerous commentators such as Fox and Stallworth (2004), Einarsen (1999), and Leymann (1996) suggest that an antecedent of bullying can be conflict that has become out of control or escalated without appropriate intervention. Control as a factor in coping with bullying also appears in the literature. Fox and Stallworth (2006) discuss the value and role of an apology from the perpetrator to the subject of bullying. They conclude that in some cases an apology can be effective in concluding the bullying episode and possibly preventing further escalation. There is apparent inference in Fox and Stallworth (2006) that for the subject of bullying to accept an apology is a means of coping and attempting to find closure of the episode. Gibbons (2007) promotes the use of apologies as a means of 'early dispute resolution', reducing the need for formalised channels to be used to resolve conflict, thus reducing the amount of time and resources such cases can consume.

The relevance in understanding how victims cope is possibly because of the lack of control that they feel, and possibly because of the imbalance of power, a notion that is associated with some definitions of bullying and is cited as a prerequisite for bullying to have occurred, (Einarsen and Skogstad 1996). Maintaining a

degree of control using coping strategies is pursued by Zapf and Gross (2001). They subtly contend that “successful victims” avoid escalation of conflict and thereby imply that they exit the bullying cycle without recourse to formal strategies. The consequences to victims in losing or perceiving to lose control through the poor use or no use of coping strategies in bullying situations however is wider and altogether more complex than described above. Serantes and Suarez (2006) maintain that victims are reluctant to report events related to bullying in the workplace and this possibly implies that control mechanisms may be largely self centred.

Studies into coping have become more commonplace in the last four years. The research mainly seems to be North American in nature, for example, Heames and Harvey (2006), Lee and Brotheridge (2006) and Yagil and Ben-Zur (2004). Maybe of greater interest to this thesis is the work of Smith et al (2003) who compare coping strategies between the bullying of children in schools and workplace bullying. Their findings showed, amongst other things, that 23% of children who were bullied used interventionist strategies whereas only 6% of adults who were bullied as children recalled using this technique, although this contradicts Ferris (2004) who maintains employees often seek intervention when bullied.

Although Smith et al (2005) attribute their findings to the recent legislation in schools bullying, it is interesting to consider what comparisons could be made with workplace bullying. Smith et al do not pursue this avenue of enquiry. They do however maintain that those who did not cope both in school and in the workplace probably lacked social support.

Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003) conclude from Rayner (1998 and 1999) that the actual coping strategies used by victims and those that employees report if they were exposed to bullying vary significantly. The study presents an interesting set of data as to bullying victims’ actions. Of particular relevance to this thesis are those subjects questioned who approached their line manager, colleagues, and trades unions. The interventions offered through the social support are important

to understand in an attempt to discover the roles that intervention plays, who plays this role, how and when do they do it.

It is important to investigate the consequences of bullying from the perspective of the bully. This aspiration is possibly an ideal and utopia that cannot realistically be achieved. As commented previously, research that has focused on the bully in the workplace is minimal and largely vague in terms of academic rigour. Despite a comprehensive search for research about the consequences of bullying to the bully themselves, nothing was found. There is a wide range of magazine based articles, tabloid and broadcast media content available that chastises bullies via covert filming, and undercover journalism. It is recognised that these contributions are important constituent features in the workplace bullying discourses. They cannot credibly be included, however, adjacent to literature from scholarly sources.

It is important to represent the organisational perspective. Whilst there is a moral argument and indeed legal requirement for employers to provide safe workplaces and that employees, visitors, and contractors. are protected via the employers' duty of care, there is also a more economically oriented consideration in preventing workplace bullying. Fox and Stallworth (2006) are clear in stating that downwards bullying from a manager to a subordinate can irreparably disengage the employee from the organisation even after an apology from the perpetrator. Fox and Stallworth's research into the value of apologies in resolving workplace bullying disputes is important. Translating the value of the apology into monetary terms and the speed at which the dispute may be settled have tangible meanings for corporations. Time and resources consumed resolving disputes in the workplace are costly, (Gibbons, 2007, p21) and remedies in the courts arising from cases of workplace bullying are increasing, (Gibbons, 2007, p21). Further, costs to the exchequer to fund UK employment tribunals are significant at £120M per annum.

There are wider financial impacts because of workplace bullying. Sheehan (1999) cites decreased morale and consequential decreased productivity and higher staff turnover leading to increased recruitment and training costs as additional financial

impacts to organisations arising from workplace bullying. Giga, Hoel, and Lewis (2008) claim that workplace bullying costs the UK economy £682.5M and 100M days lost productivity per year. These impacts are significant factors that must be considered. At the time of writing this thesis, the emphasis in the research seems to remain focused primarily on the targets of workplace bullying. Whilst this is a moral and laudable approach, it may be an unpleasant reality that the debate has to be commoditised into a financial value to engender a more industrialised response from employers.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three concludes at this juncture having explored bullying behaviours, the supposed reasons for bullying and the alleged consequences for those who have been bullied drawing upon research over the past 10-15 years. Reflecting on the behaviours of the bully and the target of the bullying, it seems apparent that the social setting is an important factor. This may be the target or the bully's social upbringing, the organisation within which the bullying takes place or the network that surrounds the bully and target. The use of power to create a harmful differential appears implicitly in many guises, some of which may be more feasible to address than others.

Bullying is a complex social construct, where the values, needs, and wants of the social groups and individuals involved cannot easily be analysed to determine cause and effect models, providing neat solutions to remedy the problem. Is this a fundamental challenge for the Acas helpline? Can telephone conversations truly address individual cases of workplace bullying if it is as complex as is suggested here? Where the bullying is chronic, advanced, and exhibiting behaviours such as severe misuse of power, it seems that the Acas helpline's role may be limited. This is because of the limitations of intervention when offered via a telephone helpline. It seems unfeasible for a telephone conversation to do little more than affirm the caller needs a more thorough level of support.

What about those arguments promulgated about the role of the organisation in workplace bullying, the failings of leaders driven by targets and empowered to act without regard for their colleagues, and the implicit menace that allegedly

characterises performance related pay? Has the role and function of HRM resulted in a deterioration of interpersonal behaviour to the degree that some commentators appear to allege? If this problem is as significant as is alleged, then the role of the Acas helpline may be far larger and more important than is currently perceived. With a significant percentage of organisations facing targets and pressures from many sources, continuously in a state of change, and centred on individual reward rather than collective bargaining, the scope for the Acas helpline would appear to be exceptionally large. Alternatively, is it the faceless organisation which is a source of harmful power that would be seem to be impossible for the Acas helpline to address. If this is the case, organisations must surely need to identify either the individuals promoting such behaviour in order to start to redress the balance possibly resulting in a change of the organisational culture.

This thesis argues that there appears to be a risk emerging in the research agenda where popular organisational policies may conveniently fit the challenges faced in understanding the reasons for workplace bullying. In the pre-HRM era before the 1980s is it likely that workplace bullying was less prevalent than today because traditional personnel management was the order of the day? Whilst there is no evidence apparent to address this enquiry, it is reasonable to assume that whilst workplace bullying may have developed or evolved, it seems unlikely that it did not exist at all. Acas' role during the 1970s was dominated by facilitating resolutions between trade union and industrial giants, whereas today, the growth in their role is being evidenced in individualised interventions through such channels as the Acas helpline. Could it be that the Acas helpline is, in part, a member of an extended HRM family? By contributing to the individualised approach espoused by the proponents of HRM, is the helpline compounding the problem that HRM allegedly contributes to workplace bullying? This discussion is not intended to dismiss the valuable and credible research that has been undertaken into the causes of workplace bullying. Rather, it cautions that assumptions as to the cause of workplace bullying may simplify what is a complex social phenomenon.

As a social phenomenon, it has been shown that the effects may be socially centred, but equally may be clinical conditions warranting medical care. Is workplace bullying the source of these degenerative, chronic illnesses such as PTSD and depression? Whilst there is a growing body of research in this area, it seems appropriate for commentators to look across a wider social landscape before drawing conclusions as to the effects caused by workplace bullying. This is because these conditions may have been catalysed by a cumulative series of exposures to many events and experiences, influenced by family and friends, and socially constructed in a particular way which induces the condition. Why is it that a particular behaviour is viewed by one person as humorous behaviour and another as bullying? This thesis argues that it is because each individual will construct and interpret what they experience based on their personal lives. This is why it may be inappropriate to refer broadly to bullying behaviours, the causes of and effects of bullying.

The literature reviews in chapters two and three have provided a sound basis on which this thesis may proceed. The critical discussion has focused around how previous research could possibly be applied to the aims of this thesis. Throughout the last two chapters, considerations have examined critically whether the literature offers this thesis useful clues or signposts that may be employed later. The literature reviews on workplace bullying however do not provide this thesis with sufficient rigour to be able to address the central aim of this thesis. Chapter four will now move away from the workplace bullying literature and investigate the literature that examines intervention. The aim of Chapter four is to provide a linkage to the literature review in Chapters two and three that will show a convergence of the combined literature that is focused around the notion of third party intervention in workplace bullying.

Chapter 4: Intervention Strategies I

Chapter Overview

This chapter investigates and reviews the role of intervention in relation to the phenomenon of workplace bullying. This will be achieved by drawing upon previous research and a critical review of a range of relevant literatures available on various types of intervention. It is important that the context of workplace bullying is clearly juxtaposed with broad intervention theories. To understand intervention using the Acas helpline may possibly only be achieved by demonstrating how the two phenomena may integrate in a practical and theoretical setting. In order to realise such an achievement, it appears necessary to first demonstrate an alignment and possible relationships between intervention and workplace bullying theories. It is reasonable to state that without an understanding of how intervention theories may co-habit with workplace bullying theories, this thesis's aim cannot be met. This inquiry will explore what interventions may take place in cases of workplace bullying, who is it that makes the intervention, when the intervention is made and from what perspective the intervention occurs, and in what circumstances.

Theoretical Models

A number of theoretical frames have already been established in the workplace bullying research debate. Some of these may be useful to this thesis to conceptualise workplace bullying and intervention. For example, Glasl (1994), cited in Einarsen et al (2003, p.20) perhaps offers an illustrative representation of where intervention may occur in a conflict escalation model as shown in Figure 4.1 below.

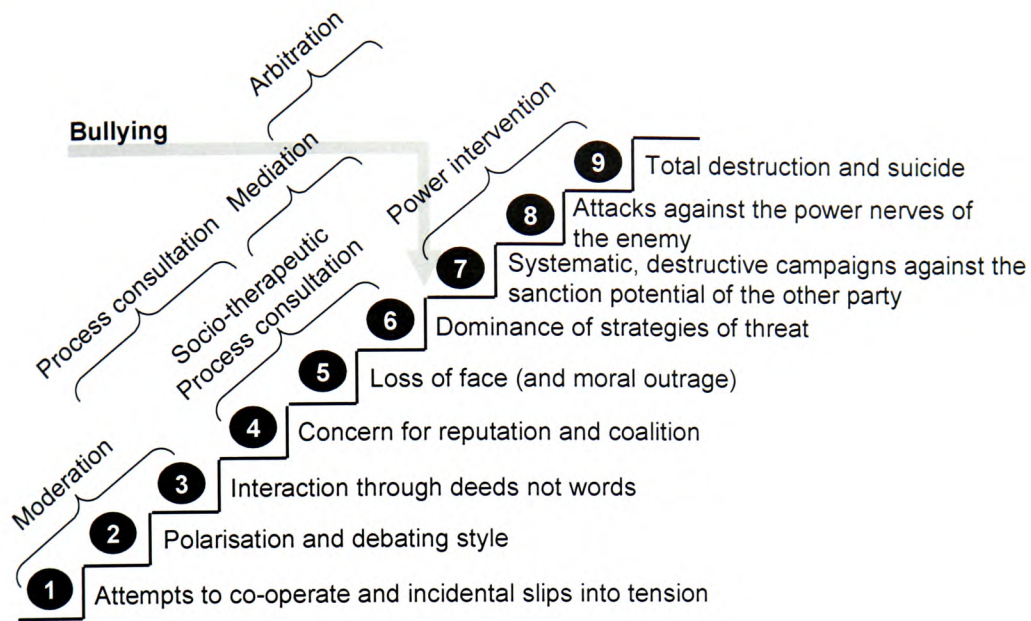


Figure 4.1: The Conflict Escalation Model of Glasl (1994)

Einarsen et al (2003 p.23) also offers the workplace bullying research debate a theoretical framework for the study and management of bullying at work as shown in figure 4.2 below.

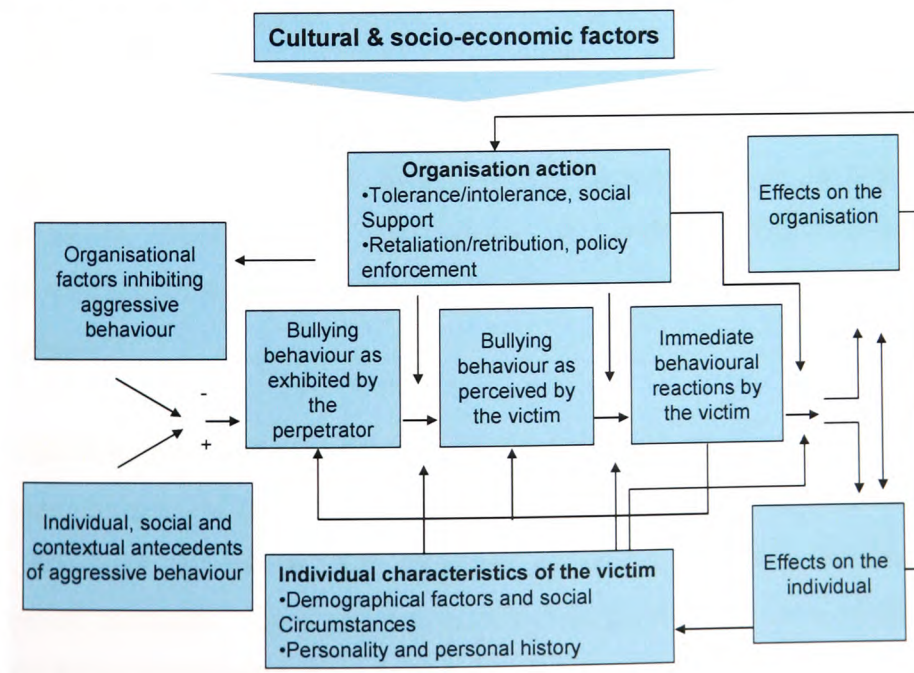


Figure 4.2: A theoretical framework for the study and management of bullying at work, Einarsen (2003)

It seems possible that implicit within the notion of the management of bullying, that intervention would be apparent. Whilst intervention is not specified and is not evident in Einarsen's model, could indicators representing intervention be applied to the model? It appears that in both Einarsen's and Glasl's models, this is entirely feasible and appropriate as managing conflict and workplace bullying would seem to necessitate some form of intervention. This assertion is supported by Hoel and Giga (2006) who discuss the impact of intervention in workplace bullying, although they do not offer a theoretical frame upon which to model intervention. The Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Workplace Bullying established by the Irish Government's Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment (2005), proposes what they term a procedural model that highlights prevention, intervention and resolution as three distinct elements. There may be some merit in considering the contribution this model offers. Whilst it appears to be primarily concerned with intra-workplace intervention, it refers to a component within the intervention process as adjudication, which it appears may occur outside the workplace and therefore possibly by a third party.

For the purpose of this thesis however, this model's recommendations will be discounted. This is because Acas, who are the subject organisation in this research, maintain an impartial perspective at all times. The model from Ireland calls for the intervening organisation to undertake formal investigations and provide findings and recommendations. Acas would be unable to fulfil the demands of this particular model. Moreover, this thesis focuses on the role of the helpline as the initial point of intervention. It would be impossible for the helpline advisor to be able to intervene in the caller's situation in the way the model suggests.

Fisher and Keashly (1990) cited in Keashly and Nowell (2003, p.351) appear to offer some direction in providing a contingency model of third party intervention which considers the intervention sequence based on escalating conflict and intervention strategies. Does this model offer this thesis some form of signpost that may help conceptualise the role that Acas plays in third party intervention in cases of workplace bullying? There is a possibility that this model can be applied to the aims of this thesis. Fisher and Keashly's model (1990) appears to represent

and codify the intervention and the role of the intervening party at various points in the chronology of the bullying episode. It is clear from the model that the role of the intervening party may be different at the various stages that the bullying episode may experience. This could also apply to Acas in the role they play in intervening in cases of workplace bullying. Fisher and Keashly (1990) appear to counsel that the role of the intervening party may vary during the bullying episode. Therefore, it is argued that there may be value in considering how this theoretical model may be adapted or employed as a reference source in developing an appropriate theoretical model or frame for the purposes of this thesis.

In an attempt to validate the use of any model, intervention models for other psycho-social phenomenon will be examined to establish any unifying characteristics that may be appropriate to contribute to the evolving theoretical frame in this thesis (see Nabatchi et al, 2007 for examples). Other models of third party intervention are evident in various ranges of academic literatures. For example, Siqueira (2002) presents a complex model for conflict and third party intervention. This example has been rejected because it employs a model based on Nash's theory of equilibrium. Nash's theory is a mathematical formula, predicated on non-cooperative game theory and strategies between two factions where single action on the part of one cannot yield a benefit without some action by the other. Whilst considered a contribution to social science (Myerson 1999), Nash's theories and approach to conflict management do not philosophically co-habit with this thesis. Nash's work was founded in quantitative approaches that aimed to somehow 'prove' the results he obtained. This thesis makes no generalised claims, as it is a snapshot in time of one particular organisation.

It is unlikely that that a single model of intervention may be identified as a utopian ideal for application in workplace bullying. This is because workplace bullying is a phenomenon that can affect different people in different ways at different times; there appears to be no particular prescription in workplace bullying research that can reliably and formulaically predict the occurrence of a bullying episode. Further, there does not seem to be a consistent formula that may be applied to resolve the situation either. Rather, this thesis aims to offer an

ingredient in the recipe of intervention strategies in workplace bullying. This approach is considered and argued by the author to be an important departure in the workplace bullying research school. Models that appear to have been developed to date (for example, Einarsen's theoretical model for the study and management of workplace bullying, (2003, p.23), seem to be most useful in academic research.

The importance of this departure therefore, is to present a model that may have both practical and academic benefits from this thesis. These benefits may be contextualised and applied in organisations to help address the social injustice of workplace bullying, and have rational business benefits, for example, reduced absence, increased productivity and decreased staff turnover, which are alleged to be consequences of unchallenged workplace bullying behaviour, (Einarsen et al 2003, p.145). Whether or not these rational and tangible consequences resonate with organisations where profit maximisation and capitalistic private sector targets are inherent in the organisation's attempt to survive remains to be seen. Whilst this comment should not be taken to infer that such materialistic demands outweigh social justice and human decency in the workplace, it may be that managers and leaders in organisations can more easily relate to objective and measurable benefits than they can the complex and subjective sociology of the organisations and the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Therefore, this thesis argues that the notion of presenting a model that may be employed by practitioners in the workplace is deemed an important contribution to knowledge and arguably a departure from previous research into workplace bullying.

Intervention

The word intervention comes from the latin, *intervenire* and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (New Ed edition, 2005) as 'the interference in the affairs of others'. A more relevant definition is offered by Reber and Reber (2001) who suggest that intervention is a generic term for a technique that is designed to interrupt, interfere, and modify an ongoing process. In psychology and psychotherapy, Reber and Reber (2001) assert that it has a specific meaning which is to disrupt maladaptive behaviour patterns. Investigating the subject of

intervention through a range of literatures suggests that the term intervention has many meanings in scholarly research.

At this juncture, it is important to set the boundaries of the inquiries made by the author into intervention. It is significant that the holistic intervention landscape is appreciated by the reader and researcher. This is because it is necessary to understand and contextualise what facet of intervention theory is being drawn upon in this thesis. Of equal importance is to understand and to justify what components within the intervention bodies of literature are being discounted as less relevant in the case of this thesis. The process of selecting and rejecting various parts of the literature as relevant to this thesis is important because intervention is one of the underpinning theories of this research. The fundamental elements within the intervention literature that are relevant to this thesis are dyadic and organisational intervention. In order to present a more focused approach, a more detailed explanation of dyadic and organisational intervention is necessary in order to help guide the reader and provide a continued point of focus within this thesis.

Dyadic and Organisational Interventions

Within the discourses of workplace bullying, there are many different parties included (Lewis 2002) with many intentions and motives and who may be engaged in cases of workplace bullying at differing times that may be related to varying stages of escalation (Keashly and Nowell 2003). Their engagement may be intrinsic within what is referred to here as the core of the bullying discourse, that is, either the subject of the bullying or the perpetrator. Additionally, it is probable that other actors may intervene as a proxy for the organisation within which the bullying episode is taking place. These people may be HR professionals or line managers responsible for those involved in the bullying episode.

It is also important to note that social networks outside of the workplace have an equally important role in intervening. Such people as friends, family, trade union or professional body representatives, and medical practitioners, ministers of religion and legal representatives may all contribute to some form of intervention

process in a bullying episode. Considering these people and potential interventions alone suggests that many permutations of intervention may take place.

For example, the relationship between the bully and the subject, the bully and the organisation, and the dynamic between the bully, subject and organisation which is possibly different to the other more simple dyadic relationships all need to be considered. The same permutations may be applied to the subject and the organisation. It is relevant and important to note that taking these three examples and replicating the relationships and discourses that may exist should not be considered as duplication. The motives and constructs that may be apparent would probably manifest themselves in different ways depending on the nature of the discourses.

Further interventions are likely in a workplace bullying episode. Trades unions may have a distinct role in cases of workplace bullying (for examples see Crawford, 2001 and Hoel and Beale, 2006). Additionally, proactive intervention is considered an important strategy in preventing and indeed addressing workplace bullying, (for examples see Elangovan, 1995, Expert Advisory Group on Workplace Bullying, 2005, Acas Policy Discussion Paper, 2006, Rayner and McIvor, 2006, Hoel and Giga, 2006 and Kozan et al 2007). Equally, however, Conlon and Fasolo, (1990), contest that whilst speedy resolution is to be welcomed, there is a benefit in allowing the conflicting parties to wrangle between themselves before intervening. Trades unions, training departments, line managers, and HR professionals may all be involved in a multiplicity of different ways in defining and delivering proactive policies in an attempt either to address an existing bullying problem or to prevent one from manifesting itself in a given organisational setting.

Such people, bodies or institutions as those mentioned above all have some formalised legitimacy in the organisational discourse. This is an important distinction to recognise as other parties are also considered to play a role in intervention in cases of workplace bullying, (Lewis, 2004), for example, 'observers' or 'bystanders', (Harvey, Treadway et al 2007) in an organisational

setting. For example, these people may be other individuals not connected with the bullying episode, but who may experience the bullying or empathise with the subject from what may seem like a distant position.

Nevertheless, in the event that such people intervene in the bullying discourse, their potential contribution to the bullying episode should not necessarily be discounted. This is argued by the author to be because they have contributed their construct of the situation to the discourse, which may have a bearing on the path that the discourse takes thereafter. For example, an informal role model in a team may influence the path a bullying episode takes through making passing comments to the target of the bullying. This may result in the target reacting in a way that she/he may not have otherwise chosen.

Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003), in discussing the observers, comment in detail on the effect that bullying has on bystanders. It seems reasonable to assume that if such an effect is created, then it is possible that the subject of the bullying will also be affected by the bystanders' discourse. It is feasible that any change to the path the discourse was previously on may be driven by the intervening actor's motive and agenda. For example, they may join in with the bullying in a manner similar to that which may be observed in school playgrounds (Smith et al 2003), or possibly act as moral entrepreneurs (Lewis, 2002) and behave in a manner as that may ostracise the bully in defence of the subject. Such interventions as these may also include people who are alien to the organisation, but close to the subject of the bullying or the alleged perpetrator of the bullying. It seems feasible that this group may include family and friends within the social network of the target.

The intervention that may be identified with such groups appears to have been the subject of little research to date. Despite a wide ranging search of the literatures, the role of the family and social networks in contextualising the process of intervention does not appear to have been the subject of scholarly research. A critical review of the literatures on stress revealed that the family unit plays an important role in supporting their family members to the extent that the support behaviour may actually ameliorate the levels of stress experienced, (for examples see Michailidis and Georgiou, 2003 and Billings and Moos, 1982). Family and

social networks are deemed to have a significant impact on an individual's beliefs and perspectives, (Thompson and Prottas, 2005). This assertion seems to infer that such an event as a workplace bullying episode would be something that was impinged upon by the individual's family or social unit, whether they are either the perpetrator or target.

The discussion illustrates the complex web that may be woven as interventions in workplace bullying take place. Some of the interventions may not appear as explicit acts; it may be that they were not intentional and it seems likely that during any workplace bullying episode that at least some of the above examples would be apparent simultaneously. It is not the aim of this thesis to explain how these discourses may interact. It is very important, however, that they are appreciated as existing in the social construction of workplace bullying; that is, that people will inevitably construct a meaning or definition for workplace bullying largely based on their overall personal experiences.

Additional investigations into intervention have been undertaken by the author drawing upon a broad suite of literatures from business, sociology, psychology, and clinical academic databases. It is apparent from the inquiries made that the concept of intervention has its roots in three particular traditions. First, the theories and practice of law, where intervention or interposition appears to be described as an administrative process referring to the bureaucracy and process associated with law making, government and the legal profession in civil and criminal law. For example, the intervention of right and permissive intervention, (where the legal community may either have a right in a case to intervene or where the opposing side permits an intervention as part of case process). The legal perspective on intervention was not pursued as there was no real relevance to the organisational and dyadic intervention context previously discussed.

Second, it is noticeable that intervention is a significant subject in the context of government and politics, where the context focuses around political interventions in both domestic and foreign affairs. Many countries have well developed intervention policies along political lines particularly regarding their foreign policy, covering such issues as military or humanitarian intervention strategies,

(for examples see Jentleson, 2007, Moore, 2007 and Walzer, 2004). This aspect of intervention presents an extensive but largely inappropriate literature for this thesis as the context is one of national or international political policy that bears no relation of value to the notion of intervention being discussed in this thesis.

Third, the medical research traditions seem to be steeped in intervention research. This is an understandable conclusion as much of the medical practitioner and researcher's work is inextricably linked with intervening between a therapy or treatment and the patient, that is, whether the intervention made resulted in the change in the patient that was hypothesised. In research, this practice helps shape the decision making processes that result in new therapies, drugs, and treatments being made available. There are examples of intervention that are inherent in clinical literatures (for example Rainham, 2007). In addition to the research perspective into intervention in the medical context, it is apparent that each procedure or consultation with a medical practitioner constitutes an intervention, (for example, Weinstein et al, 2007).

Whilst at face value, the medical body of literature may appear of little value in this thesis, it is apparent that the clinical practice of intervention through psychology and psychiatry may be of some help in helping to define a theoretical frame for intervention in workplace bullying. This is because workplace bullying has been defined as a psychological, psychosomatic social phenomenon (Tehrani, 2004, Malinauskiene et al, 2005 and Saunders et al 2007) and, as has been discussed in Chapter two, has its roots in psychology and the clinical traditions of this research school. Therefore, the contribution that may be made from clinical research in fields such as stress, (Hauge et al, 2007), anger management, (Geddes and Callister, 2007), the effects, and reasons for drug and alcohol dependency, (Delogu, 2007 and Williams, 2006), depression, (Crawford et al, 2006), and guilt and shame, (Rutten, 2006 and Tangey et al, 2005) may offer some signposts that help the reporting of the research in this thesis, which is aimed at, in part, understanding the role of the Acas helpline advisor.

There are other areas within the intervention literature that explore organisational psychology (for example see Todnem, 2005), that distil the meaning and

interpretation of intervention and help in defining the context of intervention in the sphere of workplace bullying. One of these areas, and possibly the most dominant, is organisational development theory. Organisational development (OD) is a relatively mature research subject dating back to the 1960s and the work of Becker (1964) cited in Strauss (2001). It appears that OD possibly contributed, and could have been a pre-cursor to what was the emerging shoots of the now extensive HRM research tradition that established itself as a key management subject throughout the 1980s and 1990s, (for example Beer et al, 1985 and Guest, 1987, both cited in Strauss, 2001).

During the formative period of OD, one of its key premises was to establish a means of determining organisational effectiveness and then to formulate interventions to improve organisational performance (for example see Kilmann and Herden (1976) and Porras and Berg (1977). OD could therefore be regarded fundamentally as an intervention. There is a body of literature that supports this argument (for example, Machin, 2004, Guest et al, 2003, Guthrie, 2001 and Dougherty and Heller, 1994). The way in which intervention is framed within organisational development and human resource management appears to be characterised in change management theory and practice, (for example, Ichniowski, 1997).

Literature that can be classified under the umbrella heading of change management is very large and has seen extensive growth over the past 20 years, although having a history that spans as far back as 1951, (Lewin, 1951, cited in Breu and Benwell, 1999). In order to understand the role change management plays in the context of intervention it may be divided into sub sections. This division makes the inquiry into the relationship between change management and notions of intervention in a more focused and manageable way. It is important to establish that the premise of change management seems to be generally accepted in the existing body of research as an intervention.

If, for example one explores The Academy of Management Proceedings, conference paper abstracts (2003 and 2005), which it is argued by the author is a respected scholarly publication, it may be seen that a large percentage of the

submissions cited referred to the organisational change, (for example, Durand and Huy, 2005, Herzig and Jimmieson, 2005, Palmer and King, 2003, and Brown and Humphries, 2003) being researched as an intervention. The significance of such an eminent publication categorising organisational change in this way suggests that existing academic credence is apparent in relating the theory of intervention with the phenomenon of organisational change.

Organisational transformation, (for example, Erakovic and Powell, 2006 and Breu and Benwell, 1999) appears to be one part of the organisational change literature that may be used to illustrate the role that intervention plays in organisations. Transformation is a popular research subject in the Organisational Development research schools, (for example see Peng, 2003, Uhlenbruck, 2003, Romanelli and Tushman, 1994 and Haveman, 1992). It can be described as an organisational process, (Newman 2000) sometimes led by a transformational leader who facilitates a change in the organisation through a series of events that result in a metamorphosis of the organisation which hitherto has been subjected to a set of internal or external factors that have necessitated change.

Organisational change and workplace bullying are alleged to have a distinct relationship. Skogstad et al (2007) conclude that organisational changes are directly related to exposure to bullying. With the levels of change that are apparent in organisational life in the 21st century, it seems feasible that workplace bullying could increase as a direct consequence of higher order organisational needs for change and transformation.

Intervention in the transformation body of research also encompasses such aspects as transforming culture (Breu 2001 and Gebhardt et al 2006), and innovation, (Hope Hailey 2001 and Dovev 2006). This is a relevant observation as the intervention literature implies that intervention can be an objective and tangible phenomenon, as well as one that would seem to be subjective and less prescriptively defined. This is seen by the author as an important observation because it helps define the extent to which intervention takes place in organisations, and the meaning and definition associated with intervention. Where, for example, cultural intervention is discussed, do the researchers actually

mean intervening in the cultural norms of the organisation or intervening in some facet of the organisation that impinges upon and subsequently contributes to the formulation and development of the organisation's culture? In order to address this question, it is important to understand the basis of the philosophical and ontological foundations on which the argument has been built. This thesis draws upon social construction as a philosophical foundation because in order to understand the role that Acas plays in intervention, an individualistic approach must be adopted to this research. This is because fundamentally, the intervention is a socially constructed phenomenon. This therefore offers the researcher the most appropriate opportunity of being able to determine the realities that the helpline advisor is both presented with and creates in intervention episodes.

Intervention as Instrument

This thesis is largely concerned with the impact of intervention at an individual level. It is suggested it is necessary to move this thesis forward by examining intervention conducted by an instrument of the organisation at an individual level. The instrument may be a HR consultant, a line manager, or similar person empowered by the organisation to address and manage interventions in cases involving employees. Are there similarities where intervention takes place within an organisation that may be comparable to the role Acas plays as a third party? Individualised intervention may be undertaken in organisations in a number of different circumstances.

One likely scenario may be an organisational policy or initiative being invoked upon an individual, where the policy is enacted by an 'entity' rather than 'the organisation'. Such policies or initiatives could include coaching (Maurer and Solamon 2006), mentoring (Wasburn and Crispo 2006), disputes, (Elangovan 1995), disciplinary process and procedure (Earnshaw et al 2000), grievance process, (Harroway 2005) and performance appraisal (Wilson and Western 2000) for examples. It remains difficult to isolate the individual intervention experience and discourse in these literatures.

Whilst it is clear in the coaching, mentoring, grievance and parts of the conflict management literature that the intervention focuses on one person, there is little

evidence or discussion about the individualistic nature of the intervention. For example, research into a structured interview coaching program, (Maurer and Solamon, 2006) was conducted using exclusively positivistic and quantitative techniques. Whilst there is an evident benefit in this research having been conducted, it appears that it falls somewhat short of being able to understand the effectiveness of the program through a questionnaire. This is because the questionnaire potentially generalises to an extent that the voice of the individual may not be heard.

To be clear, this is not to dismiss such research, or even to suggest that by conducting a more interpretive based research that a more developed result would be reached. Rather, the author's argument is that where the intervention episode is founded on a dyadic relationship, generalisations typically associated with positivistic research and empiricism appears to have the potential to reveal less than could be achieved via other research methods. Wasburn and Crispo (2006) embrace the notion of appreciative enquiry, (Whitney 1998), which it appears is founded on interpretive concepts, yet their final assessment seems not to acknowledge an important need to address the inquiry at an individual level. This thesis' approach contends that to omit or avoid placing the individual at the centre of the research appraisal would result in a failure to satisfy the aim of thesis.

From the range of literatures examined, there appears to be a trend where the research focuses on the organisational context of intervention with individuals. How does this relate to the role that Acas plays in intervention? Acas suggest that the effectiveness of training as an intervention in workplace bullying has limited effectiveness if the context of the training fails to relate to the actual relationship issues experienced by the perpetrator and subject of the bullying, (Acas Policy Discussion Paper, 2006). This thesis suggests that the intervention has to be between individuals, not 'an organisation' and an individual. The organisation has to manifest itself as an individual such that the discourse of the bullying episode is properly understood and addressed.

If the notion of interpersonal relationships and the understanding of them are indeed critical to the concept of intervention, it naturally follows that

understanding the relationship between caller and helpline advisor is fundamental to this thesis. How do the theoretical elements interweave to form a tapestry of workplace bullying interventions? In order to address this question, it is first necessary to understand the boundaries of the various literatures such that they focus and address workplace personal relationships. The body of literatures is otherwise too large to make meaningful sense.

It is evident from the literature that interpersonal relationship research and theory encompasses a wide area, some of which has been discounted as insufficiently relevant to make a meaningful contribution. Therefore, focus has been given to the area of relationships between individual people situated in the workplace. This is because there is a significant body of research that discusses personal relationships in group settings and for example, the provision of training about interpersonal relationships to groups of people, which may be considered an organisational development intervention rather than that of interpersonal relationships themselves.

Identity Theory – the ‘Self’

In an attempt to understand the interpersonal relationship that is created between two individuals (or a group of people if mobbing is apparent) during the course of a workplace bullying episode and intervention, it may be important to address the concept of understanding self in the first instance. This is most commonly referred to as identity theory and has been conceptualised since Descartes, (1596-1650), “I think, therefore I am.” Identity is usually conceived as a very particular set of opinions, judgements, evaluations, and attitudes manifested by a person towards herself (Doise, 1998). In order to locate identity theory appropriately here, it is also necessary to conceptualise it as a social phenomenon. This is because it may be argued that the self may have been assembled, in part, by the experiences of the individual in the social world.

Doise (1998) defines social representation as generally organising principles of symbolic relationships. He adds that the representations held by the self permit the individual to locate himself/herself in relation to significant social objects, with the self being an intrinsic part of the social representation and one of the

objects within it. It appears that this definition and explanation of identity has some resonance with social construction; the self is considered an inherent part of a social entity and each part of that entity is unique in its make up and how it contributes to the reality of the social world as observed by the self.

Deschamps and Devos (1998) pursue the notion of the social self and clearly distinguish between the social self (me) and the personal self (I). They add that there is a distinct difference between the two identities, suggesting that the social self is codified as part of the self that refers to cognitions arising from socio-ecological positions (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). Bar-Tal (1998) is clear in stating that the membership of social groups is what the individual social identity is built upon, using the relationships with multiple groups as reference points in constructing the personalised self identity.

It is important to note that the attraction to a group because of similarities may not only be due to coincidental factors, but also because of observed differences with other groups. The differences and similarities work together to either generate high levels of similarity or differentiation. Deschamps and Devos (1998) note that where strong identification with a group is evident, the differentiation within the self from other groups becomes equally strong. Where differentiation between the personal self and the social group is apparent, it has been suggested (Doise, 1998, p.17) that a need to create a 'distance' from the group is necessary to negate the feeling of difference that ensues.

These arguments seem to have some applicability in cases of workplace bullying. For example, Williams (1997), and Baumeister and Tice (1990), cited in Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003, p.139) suggest that it is probably a basic human fear to be prevented from interacting in a group setting where receiving the attention of significant others is important in a social setting. Relating the comments offered in Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003) to the theories of social identity, it could be suggested that in cases of workplace bullying the social self becomes so differentiated in terms of its relationships with his or her social networks that a feeling of psychological drowning (Williams 1997) occurs.

It seems apparent in workplace bullying that the differentiation is not desired by the subject of the bullying, rather that it is imposed on them by the perpetrator. How is the 'forced exile' of the social self accommodated within the social identity debate? Williams (1997) suggests that the ostracism that may occur in workplace bullying leads to physiological deregulation by interfering with the brain's functions relating to aggression and depression. Einarsen and Hellesoy (1998) posit that exposure to ostracism is related to extreme anxiety and the breakdown of the basic physiological process. The 'desired identity images', (Mikkelsen, 2001) associated with the social self become suppressed and the individual may cease to be able to relate to themselves in the social self sense. How are the suppressed feelings in the social self accommodated?

One possibility that appears plausible is that the personal self subsumes the social self as the ostracising becomes more dominant and the 'desired identity image' fades as the social interaction becomes less. Turner (1987) cited in Bar-Tal (1998) argues that a self identity results from the self-categorisation of the individual into social networks and categories. He adds that the individual evaluates themselves only in terms of the categories to which they belong. This leads to a series of cognitive representations that formulates and conceptualises a representation of the self. Turner's arguments may have some resonance in the workplace bullying debate. Part of the categorisation that the individual may relate to, that is, the organisational social network, may have been suppressed through extreme differentiation, due to ostracism and exclusion through workplace bullying. This feasibly could lead to the subject of the bullying being left without an important category that contributes to providing him or her with a personal identity.

The inquiry into identity theory presents an interesting perspective in the context of intervention in workplace bullying and the aims of this thesis. There may be relevant signposting from this school of research that helps further shape the understanding of the role Acas plays in cases of intervention in workplace bullying. In order to maximise the value that identity theory makes to this thesis, it is also necessary to broaden the scope of the inquiry to schools of research that may be considered juxtaposed to, or peripheral to, identity theory. For example,

what role does emotion play in the discourses that may be apparent when subjects of workplace bullying call the Acas helpline?

Eisenberg (2001) argues that more recently, identity theory consists of a means of understanding and negotiating self ambiguity through emotion. Bell and Calkins (2000) contest that identity of self is the regulator of mood or emotion in what they describe as the 'executive self'. Horrocks and Callahan (2006) proffer that a continual and dynamic construction of identity is apparent where individuals wrestle with their emotions in an attempt to maintain a self respecting image. The wrestling that is likely to take place if one were a subject of workplace bullying would seem to be a degenerative process whereby the person would become worn down as they attempted to suppress the emotion felt and maintain the image that they feel is outwardly acceptable, despite the treatment counteracting their efforts. In cases of workplace bullying, this may manifest itself as shame (Lewis 2004) or as a desire to retain the respect of colleagues (Archer, 1999). This tension appears to attempt to balance itself between the individual's reality and the image in which they wish to be seen and forms part of the workplace bullying research debate through the agenda of coping (for example Zapf and Gross, 2001).

The introduction of emotion into identity theory is both important and relevant. Callahan and McCollum (2002) state that emotion can be defined as a culturally based interpretation of a physiological state which enables an individual to act. For example, placing Callahan and McCollum's (2002) definition in context with this thesis, it is posited by the author that emotion affects the social self, possibly because of an adherence to group identity and norms, which in turn precipitates an environment potentially conducive to workplace bullying. This appears a rational argument, particularly regarding the bully, where bullying behaviour is considered an inherent part of the organisation's behavioural make up.

For example, there is evidence in the literature on workplace bullying that cultural conditions in organisations may have been partly the reason for cases of workplace bullying, (Lewis and Rayner, 2003). It is also feasible that in organisations who have adopted anti-bullying policies that bullying has become a facet of organisational behaviour that is culturally considered wholly

inappropriate and perpetrators of such behaviour may be considered organisational pariahs. Acas advocates that communicating policies is an important part of the process (Acas Policy Discussion Paper, 2006), which implies that possibly awareness of an anti bullying policy aids the cultural position in rejecting such behaviours in the workplace. This position however does require critical review.

Vickers (2006) appears to interpret and regard such policies as those above as synonyms for what she refers to as 'organisational wellness'. Her contention is wellbeing of individuals in organisations is more important than necessarily organisational wellbeing. Organisational wellbeing is possibly a difficult concept to realise in terms which are set out using human descriptors. Whilst organisational 'well being' may be measured in terms of sales, profit and loss, it seems unlikely this could be achieved using people as proxies for the organisation itself as the generalisation would probably be too great to have relevant meaning.

Vickers (2006) concludes that those individuals who are so minded to be bullies may well not benefit from training that all too often results in the target of the bullying learning that they should have been more assertive. Therefore, it seems apparent that despite possible benefits to training and other organisational intervention, the matter of the personal self lies at the heart of understanding the need and the application of the intervention. How is the 'personal self' [in Callahan and McCollum's stated definition] located in an attempt to address the issues stated above? It is here argued that the personal self emotions relating to the bully are likely to be very complex and given the difficulty of obtaining data from bullies in the workplace (Lewis 2002), it is regrettably unlikely that a useful scholarly comment may be offered in this thesis. This is because the question that is essentially being asked of the bully is for them to explain what are possibly sub-conscious cognitions that have possibly over a period given rise to the individual's choice to decide to bully a colleague in the workplace. With regard to the target of the bullying, there is research that offers some insight into the emotions that may have been experienced at the time that the bullying occurred (for example, Lewis, 2002, Liefoghe and MacKenzie-Davey, 2003). It is important to appreciate that the interpretation of the emotions that have been explained to the

researcher may have been manipulated over time by the participant or possibly, depending on the rigour of the research, by the researcher.

This initial comment regarding identity theory and emotion theory offers an understanding of the interpersonal relationships concerned in cases of workplace bullying where Acas offer an intervention via their telephone helpline. The above comments and inquiry may provide some useful clues to understanding intervention in cases of workplace bullying research. During an intervention, the identity of the victim may be an important component in the discourse to both recognise and understand. If one were to consider the bullying episode and explore the discourses that may be contextualised with identity and emotion theory, it appears reasonable that the process of intervention may have to determine and rationalise the subject's demeanour.

Workplace bullying has been referred to as 'a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work related stressors put together' (Wilson 1991). Workplace bullying has also been described as an emotional phenomenon (Keashly, 1998). Given these two perspectives, it seems feasible that the subject of the bullying episode, or indeed a person representing the organisation who may be calling Acas about a bullying episode, could be displaying emotions that would require a level of analysis by the helpline advisor in order to be best placed to offer them appropriate advice.

The victim's real perspective and the picture of themselves they may be trying to portray, which may well be a façade, are possibly different. It seems possible that some kind of 'mask' could be worn that facilitates and enables the victim to seek the intervention whilst dealing with their own self reality of the circumstances in which they find themselves. Equally important is the identity created by the Acas employee. It is reasonable to assume that the same comments apply for these people as applied to the victim.

The identities created by people in situations such as those discussed above are explored by Sheehan and Jordan (2003) who draw upon the work of Putnam and Mumby (1993) and emphasise the importance of 'bounded emotionality'. The

suggestion of bounded emotionality implies that behaviours are implemented in the workplace that are voluntary to the extent that they aim to maintain and enhance relationships. Sheehan and Jordan (2003) add that in the case of workplace bullying, bounded emotionality helps to identify ways that the perpetrator may modify his/her behaviour and equally that the subject may express their feelings over the bullying. It seems possible however that the notion of bounded emotionality may also lead the perpetrator and subject to modify their behaviours in a negative sense in an aim to maintain organisational norms.

Bounded emotionality appears to have been explored by Archer (1999) who contests that in some cases, in the emergency services, it is preferred to tolerate the bullying than upset the cultural norms and relationships, the consequences of which may be worse than the bullying. This argument appears to be supported by Deschamps and Devos (1998). They postulate that where a strong affinity with the identity of the group, known as intragroup covariation, is apparent, the intraindividual identity, that is the combination of the social, personal and possibly other identities is suppressed in favour of conforming to the identity and standards of the group. This results in what Codol (1975) terms the superior conformity of the self.

This argument deals with the identity of self and the emotions of interpersonal relations and may be illustrated by relating to a hypothetical example that could realistically be experienced by an Acas helpline advisor as shown in the following scenario.

During a call with a person who has contacted Acas, it is reasonable to suggest that the underlying reason for the contact may be consciously or subconsciously suppressed by the caller. For example, an employee who has had holiday requests repeatedly denied may seek advice from Acas regarding their legal entitlement. Is this a holiday entitlement issue or a workplace bullying issue? This may depend on the way the caller represents himself or herself. For example, there may be clues in the language they use, their diction, or intonation of speech; they may refer to situations or previous circumstances that at a superficial level could be considered irrelevant to the stated reason for the call. It may be that they choose to suppress the workplace bullying viewpoint because they are male and working in the construction industry, where to make an allegation of bullying may be met with ridicule from co-workers. Simultaneously, the helpline advisor has to assimilate the information provided and using their training and experience make a personal judgement on how best to advise the caller. This judgement may be influenced by previous experiences working as a helpline advisor, their own experiences or ones they have been told about. Each and every one could affect the advice they offer, and possibly the outcome for the caller.

There are three observations that may be drawn from this relatively simple and possibly commonplace example. First, and possibly most importantly, the way in which the caller represents their dilemma is likely to be steeped in subjectivity, based on many variable that not only cannot be measured, but probably cannot even be identified. Second, it is possible that even if this was a case of workplace bullying, it could easily be masked as many other things, again depending on the way the caller has been influenced. Third, the advisor has to attempt to ‘see through’ the complexities, ‘red herrings’ and conjecture in order to offer the most appropriate advice. Statistics from Acas suggest that this entire conversation will last around six minutes. Can a relationship really be established to a degree that an appropriate outcome is reached in such little time?

Having established that in any relationship the identity of self is an important component to acknowledge and understand, it also seems appropriate to comment on the construction and existence of the relationship itself. Clark and Reis (1988)

suggest that if two people's behaviours, emotions, and thoughts are mutually and causally interconnected, then a relationship exists. It is contested here that the conditions cited are met when an intervention occurs between a bullied victim and an Acas employee and as such, the theoretical operationalisation of the notion of a relationship has been satisfied. Clark and Reis (1988) add, however, that the notion of relationship has properties of interdependence between the two parties. How can these interdependencies be categorised or described? Clark and Reis's commentary (1988) implies that the relationship is complex, may differ in type, and evolve over varying periods. They add that a relationship will have a chronology which appears to be founded on a time line that in 2008 may be a dated perception particularly in the case of considering relationships in the context of this thesis. These may well be a single episode, exclusively by telephone for a relatively short period.

It is evident from examination of the literatures into relationships and identity that this commentary could be significantly extended if the boundaries of the thesis required. For example, semiotics, (see Hoffmann, 2005 for example) could be further explored, with an examination of the role of signs and how such signs may be 'observed' in cases of intervention. However, the relationship conceived in the case of a caller to the Acas helpline rarely manifests itself in a physical context where visual signs and signifiers would be apparent.

Action research is another field of sociology that could have implications for research into intervention in cases of workplace bullying. Waterson (2000) cites Lewin (1946) who asserted that the only real sources of knowledge were to be found in action. Could action research be usefully employed in this thesis? Action research could also be described as a form of ethnography, (for example see Plummer, 2006). Plummer contests that one of the clear benefits of ethnography is the full immersion by the investigator into the environment of the people of interest. The value of understanding the physical worlds interacting with symbolic and sensory surroundings and behaviour patterns (or rituals) must be practiced to be appreciated. In the case of Acas' role, it is clear it would be wholly impractical to adopt an action research approach to this thesis.

This review of intervention and relationship theory suggests that both research debates are visible when considering third party intervention in workplace bullying. Are there clues that help signpost how the intervention and relationship literature may inform this thesis? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to contrast the insight gained from the above review of intervention and relationship theory and juxtapose it with an examination of intervention in workplace bullying.

Chapter 5: Intervention Strategies II

Chapter Introduction

In order to contextualise the notion of intervention when applied in practice to workplace bullying, this chapter will critically review research that has been undertaken that provides insight as to the benefits or otherwise of intervention. This chapter will illustrate what the Acas helpline role may be, based on both research and practice. This review must take a broad approach. It is apparent that intervention in workplace bullying may be subtle and less direct than may be considered. The intervention may manifest itself from within or outside the workplace. The intervention may be requested or proactively offered based on assumptions that initially do not identify bullying as the reason for the intervention. Conversely, intervention may occur when bullying is presumed to be the cause of the situation in which the person finds herself/himself. These complex scenarios present this thesis with the task of exploring how intervention takes place through the Acas helpline and what insight previous research offers that helps make sense of the role of the advisor.

Intervention in Workplace Bullying

Intervention in cases of workplace bullying remains a relatively unknown segment of the workplace bullying sphere of research. There is significant research that focuses upon the victim and the avenues that may be open to them (for examples, see Tehrani, 2003, Fox and Stallworth, 2006 and Hoel and Cooper, 2000, in Kemshall and Pritchard, 2000). These examples, and others, potentially make a useful contribution to this thesis in understanding the context in which intervention may take place and in illustrating the wider research debate. However, of fundamental importance is that the existing workplace bullying research appears to offer the reader little or no insight into the role played by the party that is making or offering the intervention. The existing and current research debate seems to lack being appropriately informed about the role an intervening party plays.

Several interventions exist from the existing bodies of research. Tehrani (2003) takes a psychosocial approach to intervention based on her role as a counselling psychologist. Counselling psychologists attempt to take an objective view of the counselling episode focusing on the individual as the object of analysis, through the application of discreet or multiple formalised techniques following a psychosocial assessment. Tehrani's commentary and her perspective make a number of assumptions that are important to recognise and understand.

Tehrani implies that the intervention is within or 'quasi-internal' to the organisation. This is relevant to this thesis as the notion of third party intervention is alleged to contain different characteristics. For example, Tehrani (2003) discusses the role of the counsellor helping the organisation in the guise and role of an employee or consultant, (p.270). This may not be the case in situations of third party intervention, that is, the emphasis is exclusively on the individual, although in the case of this thesis, it is important to note that the individual may be contacting Acas representing the employer as well as the more common assumption that it is generally the employee making the contact. There is a fundamental principle in this circumstance. The organisation will have employed the counsellor or counselling service as they are likely to have concluded that there is a benefit to the organisation as well as the individual.

Such an example may be reduced sickness absence. The business case for the reduction in sickness absence compared to the cost of employing a counsellor or counselling service may appear favourable, which in turn influences the decision making process. Fundamentally, the decision to engage or offer the intervention service is made by the organisation. It is therefore suggested that the context in which the individual perceives the intervention will be different to that where the intervention is provided by an organisation that is external to the employer. This is because the alleged victim of workplace bullying is likely to be potentially disengaged from the organisation and this may well catalyse a negative or cynical perspective relating to the service being offered.

Is there an available means by which the target of workplace bullying could employ a third party via the employer? One solution to this scenario is

occupational health services, (OHS). Occupational health services are often studied in the academic research school of occupational health psychology (OHP) where OHP may be defined as the body of facts and findings that relate to the associations among work related phenomena such as work characteristics and worker well-being. (Taris, 2006). In workplace bullying research, occupational health services relating to workplace bullying have been the subject of research by Maarit Vartia (for example, Vartia, 2001) and her colleagues in Finland, where there are specific legal provisions for occupational health services, via the Finnish Occupational Health Care Act, (2001), (for example see Vartia et al, 2003).

Vartia's (2003) conclusion into the role of OHS in cases intervention in cases of workplace bullying consists of a number of points. First, that the intervention should wherever possible be preventative. This is typically in terms of an organisational level intervention and is congruent with the principles of the law that applies in Finland, although this aspect has little relevance to this thesis. Second, that the intervention may take place in small groups, however within the overall chronology of the workplace bullying episode, this must be relatively early, before the target of the bullying is unable to face the bully or colleagues. Again, as the Acas helpline is entirely reactive, this part of Vartia's work is of little use to this thesis.

Finally, Vartia discusses individualised support. She asserts that individualised support takes place when the target of the bullying episode has been deeply hurt, and has possibly developed psychological and psychosomatic symptoms. The role of the occupational health service therapist or possibly psychologist then appears to consist of a number of components. First, the occupational health service provider has to analyse the situation in an attempt to understand the representations being made by the target of the bullying. Second, the role of counsellor, where the target of bullying is aided in being able to come to terms with the experiences. Third, a form of signposting for other available support is offered, whereby the target is encouraged to engage with family and friends. Fourth, the role entails providing a potential set of strategies for the individual to use when they return to the workplace that helps them reintegrate and possibly avoids repetitions of the bullying.

This fourth aspect of Vartia's work resonates strongly with this thesis. There may be clues in the Finnish practices that could be applied to Acas. Whilst direct comparisons may not be entirely appropriate, it seems reasonable to suggest that the approach taken and the outcomes achieved may lead to suggestions for Acas to consider.

Hubert (2003), taking a Dutch perspective, discusses intervention as an internal set of processes in a systematic approach that commences with preventative measures and leads to a situation she refers to as 'after care'. She is explicit in suggesting that if the various processes she cites fail, for example, following the organisation's own policies and escalation of the matter to appropriate persons in the organisation, only then should the organisation consider the role of external parties. It is interesting to note that she suggests the trades unions would be a point of contact for such services as occupational health and statutory instruments of Government. This perspective implies that it is the victim's responsibility to catalyse the engagement of external parties.

Hubert's assertion that taking an approach which demands that the victim takes the initiative towards inviting a third party intervention is somewhat congruent with this thesis. Whilst Acas provide chargeable mediation and conciliation services it is significantly less likely that they would be contacted by an organisation to intervene at the individual level. There are however differences with Hubert that are important to note.

Hubert's suggestion that through a trades union, governmental representatives may be invited to re-check the policies of the organisation seems to shift the responsibility of the organisation to a proactive challenge by an aggrieved employee. Such a situation may reinforce the need for interventions to be beneficial when offered by impartial actors or organisations. This is because the employer is probably unlikely to be conducive to mediation when it is plausible that by this juncture a greater level of conflict may be apparent than a dysfunctional dyadic relationship between perpetrator and victim.

This situation may be more likely to become a matter of a more macro industrial relations setting where employee representation, such as trades union could be active. For example, an employee who felt they were being bullied could catalyse a process whereby certain officials request access to the organisation to what may be perceived by the organisation as an inspection or audit. Such action by the employee may give the impression to the employer that the subject of the bullying was possibly seeking some form of retribution in an attempt to possibly draw an organisation's name into disrepute.

It is unlikely that such a scenario would be beneficial to either the organisation or the subject of the bullying. Moreover, would this action actually curtail the bullying behaviour in the organisation? As previously commented in this chapter, Vickers (2006) concludes that situations similar to this hypothetical one are paradoxical in that the intervention may actually give rise to reinforce most of the bullying behaviours.

The role of the trade union intervening within the organisation has been the subject of scholarly research, (for example Heery, 2006, Machin and Wood, 2005 and Bach, 2004). Sources such as White (2005) consider trades unions to be most effective when they operate through collective voice in improving trading and operating conditions for the organisation's financial well being as well as in the more traditional role of 'power-based bargaining'. It is argued here that both the scenarios described by White (2005) are actions of intervention, although this is not explicitly recognised in his work (that examined union co-operation and mutual gains with the employing organisation).

It is postulated that White's paper is of interest as the research he conducted could be useful in making comparisons with the way trades unions could and may operate in cases of workplace bullying. This is because there is a fundamental point that by addressing the issue of workplace bullying there is mutual benefit to the employee and the employer. There is also a point in White's paper that requires critical commentary in that the intervention that is implicitly alluded to tends to refer to a collective positioning by both parties, the trade union and the employer.

The tacit assertion by White that intervention is an organisational and collective function, not in the traditional industrial relations sense, is challenged here. The intervention may be caused by a collective position from each or both parties, however the eventual act of intervention is possibly a more personalised event between far fewer people than the collective units involved. Therefore, a focus that may overlook this perspective is argued to be lacking because there seems to be no attempt to understand how the actual act and process of intervention takes place.

Badigannavar and Kelly (2005) offer an explanation that discusses the way trades unionisation occurs. They suggest that unionisation is triggered by senses of injustice in the workforce where rights have been breached by the organisation and as a collective body, the employee has a sense of 'agency'. Badigannavar and Kelly (2005) add that this sense of agency enables employees to seek their 'procedural and substantive rights' through what they refer to as 'collective action frames'. Again, it is noticeable that there is no specific reference to intervention.

Badigannavar and Kelly (2005) do refer to 'mobilisation theory' and infer that this is a form of intervention. Hoel and Beale (2006) also draw upon mobilisation theory as they attempt to explain the role and importance of industrial relations and workplace bullying. They explain mobilisation theory as a means of addressing key questions of individualism/collectivism, power, and union strategies in terms of a 'partnership-militancy continuum'. The point of relevance here is that it is explained as both a collective and individual phenomenon, which Hoel and Beale add is dependent on whether the individual perceives the episode of injustice to be a personal or collective matter.

Machin (2004) discusses the decline in union membership in the UK. Whilst in isolation the level of trades union membership and collectivism/individualism are not directly relevant to this thesis, there is a context that is notable. This context relates to intervention at an individual level and the role of trades unions. It is suggested from the selection of industrial relations literature reviewed that the foci of trades unions is collective in nature, whereas reactive intervention in workplace

bullying appears to be often at an individual level. Therefore, there is a possible argument to suggest that the role of trades unions in workplace bullying is limited given their strategic focus at a collective level. This thesis does not seek to answer whether workplace bullying is perceived as collective or individualistic. It seems probable, however, that both situations may apply in dyadic or mobbing episodes and therefore both conditions possibly apply depending on the prevailing circumstances.

There are many circumstances similar to workplace bullying where the situation may be perceived to be collective or individual. Often the custodian charged with dealing with these matters is the Human Resources or HR department (Lewis and Rayner 2003). The HR function in the organisation has allegedly changed significantly in recent years with the emphasis of transactional and transformational people management matters being devolved to the line management function (see for example Storey 1993). Lewis and Rayner (2003) pursue this perspective, stating that a central tenet of HRM is that human resources are an integral component of the organisation and as such should not be under the patronage of specialists. These assumptions over the role of the HR function in an organisation and the role of the line management function that could be argued to be a proxy for HR management warrants further comment when consideration is given to the process of intervention in general and particularly in the case of workplace bullying.

For example, Thornhill and Saunders (1998) conclude that there is a need for a co-ordinating and specialist strategic HR function to ensure appropriate integration of the function. They also purport that the line management function may see improved organisational results if they are perceived to care for the employees in their charge. It is argued here that these two assumptions may be related to the way in which workplace bullying intervention is actually played out in an organisation.

First, the intervention policy or strategy is formulated by the HR department. This exercise may set out the governance and policy for interventionist strategies and provide expert advice for line managers. Second, the actual intervention itself

is executed by the line manager, which follows the principles, rhetoric and ideology of HRM where the human resources are nurtured by the line management function in order to perpetuate competitive advantage (for example, see Beardwell and Holden, 1997).

The HR function may also undertake interventionist activities that may be applied to workplace bullying that are of relevance to this thesis. Such interventionist policies appear to be conceptualised at the organisational level, that is, they address the organisation as a whole, not differentiating between groups of people with any particular criteria (for examples see CIPD, *Managing Conflict at Work*, 2007, Hoel and Giga, 2006, Keashly and Nowell, 2003, Hubert, 2003 and Hoel and Beale, 2006). How effective is intervention when the target is a broad organisational group of people?

Hoel and Giga (2006) scientifically studied the effectiveness of management intervention in cases of workplace conflict and bullying, claiming to be the first researchers to conduct such an investigation. The setting in which they framed intervention is different to that which is described in this thesis. The focus which Hoel and Giga (2006) applied to intervention was to explain the effectiveness of intervention by the HR function on the line management population through training intervention, that is, the intervention was a proactive and pre-meditated affair designed to equip managers to address conflict and bullying in the workplace.

This training aspect of the HR function is an important one in understanding intervention. It seems to over simplify and presume that the line manager requires the training as they are not experts in managing people although this perceived lack of expertise does not warrant the HR department assuming ownership of the situation. Interestingly Hoel and Giga concluded that 'it was impossible to establish the efficacy of particular interventions or combinations of interventions'. Hoel and Giga's research warrants respect as a landmark in workplace conflict and bullying research that may have paved a way for others to take direction. Nevertheless, it does seem apparent that any possible simplification of intervention may result in inconclusive scientific research.

This alleged over simplification is addressed by Keashly and Nowell (2003) who draw upon Glasl (1982), Prein (1984) and Fisher and Keashly (1990) in discussing the role of escalation of intervention in conflict management. Whilst they note there are differences between the conflict management and workplace bullying literature, and indeed the phenomenons themselves, equally they contest that some application of the theories, models, and perspectives may be appropriate in some circumstances.

There appear to be useful signposts in Keashly and Nowell's (2003) work that help explain the role played by the line management, HR function, and third parties in the escalation and de-escalation of conflict scenarios. Keashly and Nowell (2003) advocate a contingency approach to intervention that involves mediation, conciliation, and consultation, depending on which part of the escalating or de-escalating journey the parties find themselves located. Some of these approaches such as mediation and conciliation are services offered by Acas and are alleged to be successful where the organisation engages them at the appropriate time and with a constructive approach that seeks a mutual resolution for all parties. The aforementioned approaches also provide a perspective from which to consider the intervention provided by the helpline because of the differences and similarities. In the case of the helpline, the catalyst for the intervention is the caller, whether subject or perpetrator of the workplace bullying. In the case of mediation and conciliation, the catalyst is the employer, particularly as these services are not free and as such, a financial commitment is necessary. The willingness of the organisation to make a financial commitment infers that there is intent to reactively resolve the problem, whatever that may be. Proactive financial investment by organisations is also evident in providing intervention opportunities for employees through schemes such as employee assistance programs and occupational health services.

Spurgeon (2003) suggests with reductions in occupational disease the role of occupational health has broadened and shifted in focus to include more psycho-social as well as physical determinants, encompassing a wide range of issues that Spurgeon refers to as 'occupational related stress'. Critical to this intervention

approach is a continuous cycle of review and change in an attempt to ensure the risk is not realised and that mitigation techniques should always be effective. It is noticeable that similar to previous comments made about intervention, the approach discussed is an organisational intervention. Intervention by the occupational health professional with the individual seems to be less understood. Kinman and Jones (2005) and Spurgeon (2003) suggest that self referral to the occupational health department is possible, although it seems more likely that the organisation will request an intervention takes place by the occupational health department, implying that the intervention has been stimulated by the organisation and not the individual.

This argument prompts two questions. First, why would an employee seek support from the occupational health professional? Second, what would cause the HR or line management function to request an intervention from the occupational health department? There appears to be little research that has investigated the discourses that may be evident in the process of the organisation engaging occupational health services. There are clues however, that may provide some signposts that could be helpful.

These clues lie in the more recent statutory instruments and legal provisions that have been made to protect employees against such matters as disability, sexual harassment, race, age, religion, sexual orientation and gender discrimination as well as the established provisions such as the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974). Sheehan (1999), Jenner (2006) and Von Bergen et al (2006) all discuss the financial implications to organisations in terms of employees' claims through such bodies as the employment tribunal and courts. It is suggested that organisations, especially larger ones, are likely to take steps to mitigate the risk of being found to have failed to exercise the duty of care they have with their employees. One way of doing this is to have sought expert advice from such a service as occupational health. Whilst this assertion does not seem to be referenced in the literature, there appears to be agreement between Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health that practices to mitigate legal action, reduce claims in Employment Tribunal, and avoid negative publicity, are generally adopted.

In the case of workplace bullying, there is evidence from the body of research to suggest that a target of bullying may wish to seek support from someone who is remote from the bullying episode (for example, Meglich-Sespico, 2007, Kohler and Munz, 2006, Giga et al, 2003, and Hoel and Cooper, 2000). It is likely that the occupational health service will either be an outsourced service or part of the corporate HR team (Spurgeon 2003). Therefore, the suggestion that an employee may approach the OHS engaged by the organisation appears to be a reasonable assumption on the grounds set out above. Using the same argument, it also seems likely that an employee may contact other organisations or functions that could provide a similar model of support. One such increasingly popular model is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

An EAP is defined as a mechanism for making counselling and other forms of assistance available to a designated workforce on a systematic uniform basis to recognised standards (Alker and McHugh 1999). Highley and Cooper (1994) at the time suggested the US and UK EAP providers were unable to demonstrate benefits in a quantitative business manner, such as return on investment, although a later evaluation suggested this was approximately \$4:1. Other commentators, (for example, Deitz et al 2005, Fisher, 2002, and Collins, 2001), examine the benefits of EAP schemes but resist citing empirically measured benefits, such as financial return on investment.

The reason for the difficulty in determining effectiveness is alleged to be due to the confidential nature of the service provided. The senior management at Acas face similar difficulties for similar reasons. Acas does not seek to establish the effectiveness of its services offered via the telephone helpline provided and therefore except for its annual survey, discussed in Chapter 1, Acas cannot solicit direct feedback from callers to determine the outcome of the issue about which they originally called.

Reddy (1994) identifies many aspects of implementation and effectiveness for EAPs through the lens of the employer and EAP provider. He adds that the notion of success is difficult to determine as this will often depend on what the

organisation set out to achieve. Amongst the items he cites as reasons for implementing an EAP is counselling. It seems reasonable to argue that an EAP's success is also dependent on what the employee requires and actually gets from the service. It is evident from other research and reviews of companies offering these services that the scope of the EAP can include subjects that are arguably not directly related to the work environment such as debt advice, weight loss, and relationship counselling. Is it feasible for an organisation to determine success of its EAP based on such subjective topics as those cited above?

Dewe (1994) argues that one of the biggest organisational reasons for implementing an EAP is to manage the levels of stress in the workforce which possibly supports the benefits of using third parties to provide reactive intervention into workplace issues. Fisher (2002) describes the way that EAPs in the 21st century are becoming support mechanisms for 'survivors' after the downsizing she alleges made significant negative emotional impacts on organisations in the late 20th century. It seems improbable, that based on a review of a wide range of literatures, there is much to support the need to understand why an employee may contact an EAP rather than an internal support function in order to seek support.

The literature appears to have had a hiatus of activity in the mid 1990s, (for example Harlow, 1998, Wagar, 1996, Berridge, 1996 and Megranahan, 1996), with seemingly less being published afterwards. Again, where the individual is concerned in cases of confidential support, there appears to be a deficit in the research that informs the debate from the employee perspective or from the perspective of the person, individually, employed by the assistance provider. The EAP body of literature does suggest that an effective communication program is important in promoting the service, particularly where the employer wishes it to be perceived as a benefit, (Alker and McHugh 1999 and Berridge et al 1997). This may provide some clues as to why employees may engage the service, although there appears to be no empirical evidence to support this suggestion.

Reddy (1994) suggests that in the age of multiple interdependent care agencies, such as counselling, GPs, health centres, coaches, mentors and lifestyle therapists,

referrals between them to satisfy an ever increasing hunger from the population for what he refers to as psychotherapy is inevitable. This is an interesting departure in the literature and implies that there may be many more agencies than we currently perceive that are intervening in cases of workplace bullying. Of particular significance is the strong likelihood that these agencies intervene at the individual level, that is, their role does not extend to, or seek to address the problem at an organisational level. Whilst this level of intervention requires more research to better understand the role of intervention, there remain the barriers of confidentiality with such agencies that will inevitably make access to the rich data an ongoing difficult task. If Reddy's assertion (1994) above is considered further, it seems plausible that the role of the individual's social network, that is, family and friends outside the workplace as well as those within their workplace organisations, are likely to contribute to the realities constructed by the individual.

Despite an extensive search across a wide range of research topics and literature, currently there appears to be little evidence offered that provides an insight into the role the social network of an individual plays in their work life. Interestingly in the field of workplace bullying, the impact of networks has been the subject of research by Coyne et al (2003) whose investigations encompassed an examination of the role of social groups in the working environment. There is also some anecdotal evidence in non-scholarly literature regarding bullying of children in schools that may offer some signposting towards the role that families and friends play with victims of workplace bullying.

Websites such as bullyingonline.org and bullying.co.uk refer in their notes to parents about the possible memories of bullying when in school. There is no claim made here, or on the websites cited, that their commentary may be interpreted in the context of workplace bullying. It may be possible however, that by stimulating memories of bullying of children in schools by, for example, browsing the Internet and viewing the above mentioned websites, that this suggestion may contribute to formulating an opinion which may be offered by friends and families to victims of workplace bullying. Further, it seems equally possible that the realities created by social networks such as friends and family

may well be informed from experiences and memories of bullying whilst in a school environment.

These comments regarding the role of these social networks have been made with significant caution and trepidation. There appears to be little scholarly evidence that directly underpins the assertions. This signifies that this area may be one that requires research to better understand the discourses and roles played. It is evident however that a substantial contribution to research has been made by those studying the bullying of children in schools and set within this literature there are useful contributions about intervention strategies that may provide indications which could be useful in workplace bullying research, policy and practice.

Olweus has probably been one of the most significant contributors to the research around the bullying of children in schools since the 1970s, (see for example, Olweus 1979, 1994, 1996, 2003 and 2003a). Olweus has defined an intervention program called the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (2003a). Olweus, (2003a) contests that with a suitable intervention program it is definitely possible to reduce the extent of bullying and victim problems and associated behaviour problems in schools. Olweus's approach appears to be predicated on his assumption that it is inherently a principle of fundamental human rights that a child should be safe and free of the consequences of bullying, (Olweus 1979). His intervention model is relevant to this research as it approaches the intervention from a number of perspectives, including that at the individual level.

Olweus (1994) point of departure is that the awareness and involvement in the phenomenon of bullying is a mandatory prerequisite. He then proposes that the outcome of the intervention program must be evidence based and offers measures at the school, class, and individual level. It is argued that some parallels exist between Olweus's model (1994) and examples of descriptive and prescriptive suggestions in the workplace bullying research field.

For example, Rayner et al (2002) offer suggestions of what organisations and individuals can and should do in cases of workplace bullying in a similar way to

which Olweus (1994) suggests what schools, classes, and individual students should do. Whilst the actual detail of the action or process may differ, it is argued here that the principles and the intent have similar attributes. Moreover, the outcome desired by both the workplace bullying and schools bullying researchers and practitioners appear to be similar. There is clearly a difference in that some organisations may be focused on improved productivity whilst schools may reflect more on improved learning. Both seem to target the same symptom, however, in this case absence, arising from episodes of bullying.

Olweus's (1994) bullying prevention program also infers relatively distinct approaches at the differing levels where intervention takes place. At the organisational level, quantitative surveys, general promotion and awareness communication and generic staff/student engagement is most dominant. As the program permeates the layers of the school establishment, a greater evidence of qualitative activity becomes apparent. These activities include discussion groups, co-ordinating groups, regular meetings with staff and students and the development of norms surrounding bullying that are formulated by those involved in the bullying discourses.

It is here argues that such activities are an important juncture in the model and the process of implementing the model; the approach, strategy, tactics and techniques are modified to address the multiplicity of realities that inevitably exist within the body of the school. In order to create some kind of uniformity of belief and expectation, there is apparently a need to connect with the audience at a different and more personal level than the generic style that characterised the earlier stages of the program.

The measures that Olweus (1994) cites at the individual level of the bullying prevention program become further personalised and take on a distinctly interpretive flavour in what he describes as 'serious talks with bullies, victims, and involved parents'. The notion of 'serious talks' seems to highlight the difficulty in being able to prescribe the intervention at the individual level. It may be argued that the translation of organisational intervention to individual intervention is fraught with difficulty as the two are evidently very different in

their make up and the manner in which the execution of the intervention needs to take place to maximise the opportunity of a successful outcome.

UK Based Intervention Organisations

Some organisations have special skills in providing support for workplace bullying at the individual level. These organisations have established themselves on the basis that they seem to have an ethically and morally based primary focus on the individual rather than the organisation. Additionally, their role involves a quasi-representation of victims to Government, lobbying for greater legal instruments in an effort to bring justice for those affected by workplace bullying. The Andrea Adams Trust proffers that ‘it exists to support and advise [you]’. They state a 13 point plan for victims of workplace bullying to follow, the last of which is to contact the Andrea Adams Trust.

As a hypothetical exercise, the author contacted the Andrea Adams Trust to investigate what the intervention experience may be for targets of workplace bullying. It is difficult to ascertain the process or governance structure of intervention process they follow. This statement is not intended to be critical of the Andrea Adams Trust. Rather, the aim was to establish what role they may play and how this may be compared to the role Acas plays. As has been stated previously, similar to other organisations, it is evident from their website that they have a strict ethical code regarding confidentiality and as such, it is almost impossible to interpret the intervention process from the victim and organisational perspective.

‘Just Fight On’ (JFO) is another not-for-profit organisation that purports to provide advice for victims of workplace bullying, and areas the organisation claims are allied to bullying such as unfair dismissal, equal pay, and harassment. Their rationale for this wider range of services exclusively to the individual is because ‘bullying is often more than just bullying’. The intervention they provide is wider in scope than a source of direct support, although it is evident that reactive support to targets of workplace bullying is offered. The role played by ‘Just Fight On’ appears to be more of a facilitation function. They have catalysed the formation of regional support groups in the UK and overseas, in for example

Australia and France. Further, they offer categorised links to internet based online forums with niche approaches to bullying such as a Christian perspective or one that provides advice solely to women.

A review of the JFO website revealed that Just Fight On could be described as a passive intervention, that is, an online organisation. They do not appear to physically contribute to the needs of the victim through intervention. Rather, they promote themselves as the 'ultimate resource for victims bringing together information, ideas, and people'. Their self observation adds that they perceive themselves as an organisation, but also 'a toolkit, an environment, an information hub, knowledge base, community, and revolution'. This rich description offers us little in the way of understanding their role in terms of intervention. It is unclear exactly what help they offer and how that help manifests itself to the individual. It is apparent, however, that they are acting as a catalytic intervention to promote action against bullying in the workplace, encouraging disparate groups to 'pick up the baton'.

DAWN or Dignity At Work Now is another online forum, which holds face to face meetings also, that exists to promote dignity at work, highlight the negative consequences of workplace bullying, support victims and expose employers who are alleged to condone workplace bullying. Their approach differs from the two previously discussed organisations in that they offer a periodic group setting with an open invitation for those who may be affected by workplace bullying to attend. DAWN's website offers their services to those who may need help, would like to share a problem, would like an opportunity to 'get things off their chest' or simply chat in a friendly environment with people who understand what it is like to be bullied. It is unclear what the engagement by DAWN actually consists of and what is the process of intervention. As is evidently common and characteristic in these situations, it contravenes the organisation's ethical policy to discuss the details of their services.

What purpose has been served in the critical review of the three organisations discussed? The rationale has been to understand the differing models of intervention that are evident for victims of workplace bullying, primarily in the

UK in 2007. Whilst there are other organisations that purport to offer support or guidance for victims of workplace bullying, their role is that of passive signposting alone, for example the Trades Union Congress, (TUC), or that workplace bullying is a subset of their higher order organizational aims, for example the Dignity at Work Partnership. The three organisations discussed primarily exist to support victims of workplace bullying. It is asserted that they could be classified as moral entrepreneurs in that the primacy of their aim is to quell what they perceive as a growing problem.

Lewis (2002) explores the matter of 'moral entrepreneurship' citing Becker (1963), and Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994). Lewis discusses the differences in the role of the moral-entrepreneur depending on whether the basis for the moral campaign is a crusade or a panic. A crusade is defined as a campaign motivated by moralistic concerns, whereas a panic is defined as a misplaced belief that the threat to society is larger than it is in actuality. This thesis does not aim to provide an answer as to whether the organisations discussed are engaged in moral crusades or moral panics. In attempting to understand their *raison d'être* in the intervention environment, it is relevant to contextualise this perspective in terms of their publicised macro level aims and objectives. This boundary is a necessary limitation for focus on the aims of the thesis. It is recognised, however, that the assumptions made in creating this boundary may differ depending on the person seeking the intervention and the discourse(s) within which the intervention is set.

The researcher postulates that the Andrea Adams Trust appears most likely to provide a level of reactive intervention to a call for support based on contact from a victim of workplace bullying contacting them. Their contact advice and guiding principles guide the reader to assume a comprehensive level of advice, guidance and direction is available. Just Fight On (JFO) appears to take a very different role in that it does not offer services itself to those who are subjects of workplace bullying. Its role appears to re-direct to support groups. These support groups appear to have been brought into existence by JFO although there is no evidence to support this assertion. Therefore it is contested that they do not provide any form of intervention support themselves; rather, they signpost to other groups for whom they act as an umbrella organisation.

Dignity At Work Now (DAWN) appears to occupy a central ground that is different to the two former organisations. Its role seems to involve promoting the notion of dignity at work whilst simultaneously engaging individuals to support them in cases of workplace bullying. The evident difference in their model of reactive intervention, however, is that it is at a group level; that is, it is not a one to one encounter, rather a group of people who form a group on a periodic basis.

There is an additional attribute that DAWN exhibits which is that the encounter and intervention is face to face. The other organisations investigated appear not to offer such a service. The nature of a face to face intervention rather than a telephone based helpline is likely to result in a different outcome of the intervention, although this supposition cannot be extrapolated to apply to the outcome of the intervention in terms of the victim's success in dealing with the bullying episodes.

Some of the organisations that have been founded to tackle workplace bullying could be said to be led by what Lewis, (2002) refers to as moral entrepreneurs. These organisational leaders claim to have been personally affected by workplace bullying. Could it be that their personal experiences have influenced their personal construction of workplace bullying leading them to adopt a crusader mentality towards the possible injustice they perceive? It seems very likely that if they have the motivation to establish and operate organisations to promote the alleged consequences of workplace bullying that their views when intervening may well be biased and potentially lacking in clarity. This characteristic is important to recognise in terms of the style and context of the intervention. As this thesis aims to understand the role played by Acas and having set this as a fundamental boundary, it is inappropriate to widen it to encompass the organisations cited above.

The comparison between Acas and these organisations is relevant, however, for the reader to be able to better understand the landscape and shared paradigms that Acas, the above organisations and others possibly co-habit. Is it feasible that the organisations discussed could be perpetrators of the concept of moral panic,

(Einarsen et al, 2003) thus fuelling the need for intervention? As people who have suffered at the hands of bullies and have had, for example, the motivation to establish organisations as support instruments arising from their negative experiences, it seems reasonable that the reality they will have constructed will be disproportionately biased in such a way that accentuates the discourses of workplace bullying.

Accentuating the impact of a bullying episode to someone who is currently experiencing it may not be entirely helpful. Would the personalised experience of workplace bullying and the recollection of the feelings that occurred at the time, lead the support agency employee (or volunteer in the case of some self help organisations) to an imbalanced, biased response to a request for support? This possible situation prompts the need to examine what options may be available to people who possibly find the above mentioned self help groups unable to provide an appropriate intervention.

The UK Government web based portal offers a significant amount of unbiased advice, although it only provides a 'signposting' service (direct.gov.uk, 18th September 2008). It does not purport to actually provide a service directly or formally associate itself with any of the references it provides. Rather, it simply illustrates what is workplace bullying and what potential recourse is open to the target of the bullying citing for example, constructive dismissal.

It is important to understand the chronology that may ensue in a workplace bullying episode in order to contextualise where the intervention possibly occurs. Attempting to determine when intervention occurs is too broad an objective for this thesis and falls outside of the boundaries established in Chapter 1. Identifying instances when third party intervention may occur appears to have been a facet of the workplace bullying debate that has been largely omitted to date.

There are some examples in the literature where this has been investigated and in some cases, theoretical frames have been proffered. For example, Vartia et al (2003), taking an occupational health service based approach, discuss in some detail the process that may take place at the point of intervention, apparently

assuming a number of time based factors, but do not make any comment with regard to when this may happen. Hoel and Giga, (2006) provide a flow chart based model that highlights events on a time based continuum. The process, decision based, model appears to assume that the intervening organisation determines the point at which third party intervention may take place, thus implying that the employee would not catalyse such an event himself/herself.

Einarsen et al's (2003) model conceptualises a means by which to study, and manage, workplace bullying and depicts a representation where intervention may be overlaid. This theoretical frame does not offer a means by which escalation and decision points may be readily identified, however, it is possible that it would be useful as a broad encompassing frame from which to examine intervention. The above examples have been considered in reflecting the requirements for a theoretical frame for this thesis. They have been rejected, however, as they do not seem to provide a foundation on which a model can be appropriately built for the reasons discussed above.

The objective that is required at this juncture is to determine the landscape of the bullying episode, drawing on other scholarly models and theoretical frames in an attempt to assess when intervention may occur in relation to a call being made to the Acas helpline. Satisfying this objective will contribute to helping understand the role Acas specifically plays in an intervention episode. This objective does not contest that other intervention chronologies are irrelevant. Indeed, it is important that other situations where intervention takes place are examined. The culmination of this objective is to identify and establish a potential hybrid, unifying, theoretical frame that this thesis may employ.

How can such a model or theoretical frame be compiled? In the first instance, it may be useful to understand the relationships that are potentially involved in the workplace bullying episode. These can be represented as follows in figure 5.1 that has been developed for the purposes of this thesis.

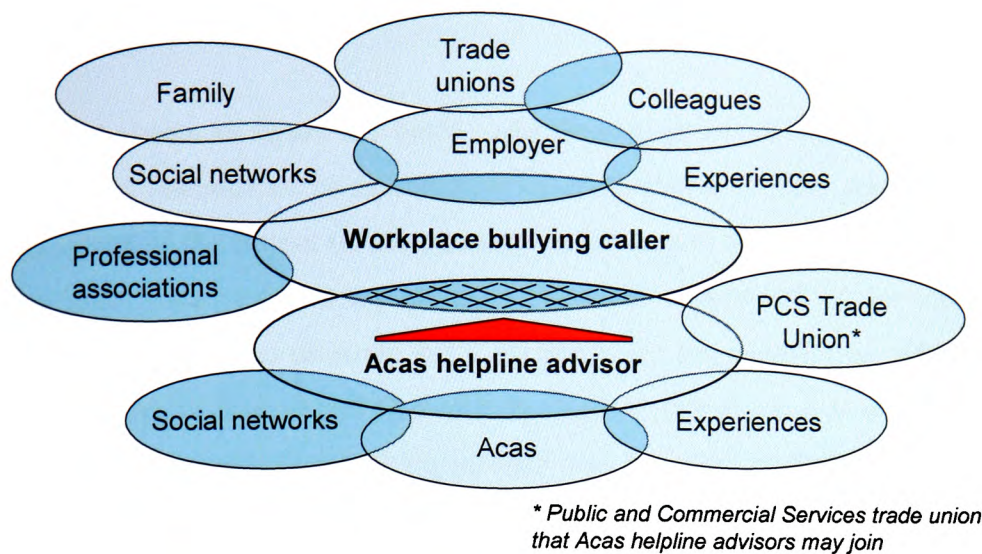


Figure 5.1: Possible relationships in the intervention process

The above model attempts to illustrate a number of important factors relevant to this thesis. First, it makes clear that the central relationship centres on the Acas helpline advisor and the caller. Note that the caller has not been specified as a target of workplace bullying. Whilst this may be considered the more likely scenario, it should not be presumed that the employer or an associate of the target of the bullying episode would not be the caller. Second, the model aims to illustrate the variety of discourses that may impinge on the helpline advisor or caller. This is considered important to this thesis as the relationships and experiences held by the caller and helpline advisor may impact the role that the advisor plays in the intervention discourse. Finally, the model depicts the precise area that is at the hub of this thesis. The shaded area highlights the relationship that is being studied; however the red block arrow is the most important signifier in the model. This is because it represents the role that the Acas helpline advisor plays in the relationship with the caller.

The model above does not depict a chronology. Time may be an important factor in considering when the intervention takes place. This may also affect the role of the advisor. For example, if the bullying has become chronic, it is likely that a different intervention may be appropriate than if the episode had taken place in the relatively recent past. In endeavouring to understand the role played by Acas, it may be assumed that the role would differ depending on a number of factors, one

of which potentially could be the point in time in the workplace bullying episode that the call is made to Acas.

The model shown in figure 5.2 below, and developed for the purposes of this thesis, is not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive. The lines on the model represent the impact of the bullying on the target, that is, the experience that is held by the person being bullied. The paths represented by the various lines are not intended to illustrate every eventuality or the complexities that may be apparent in a workplace bullying episode. Rather, its purpose is to depict what a chronology of a workplace bullying episode may be, based on previous research that appears in the workplace bullying literature (for example, Hoel et al, 2004, Duffy et al, 2002, Tepper, 2000, Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2001, and Aquino et al, 1999).

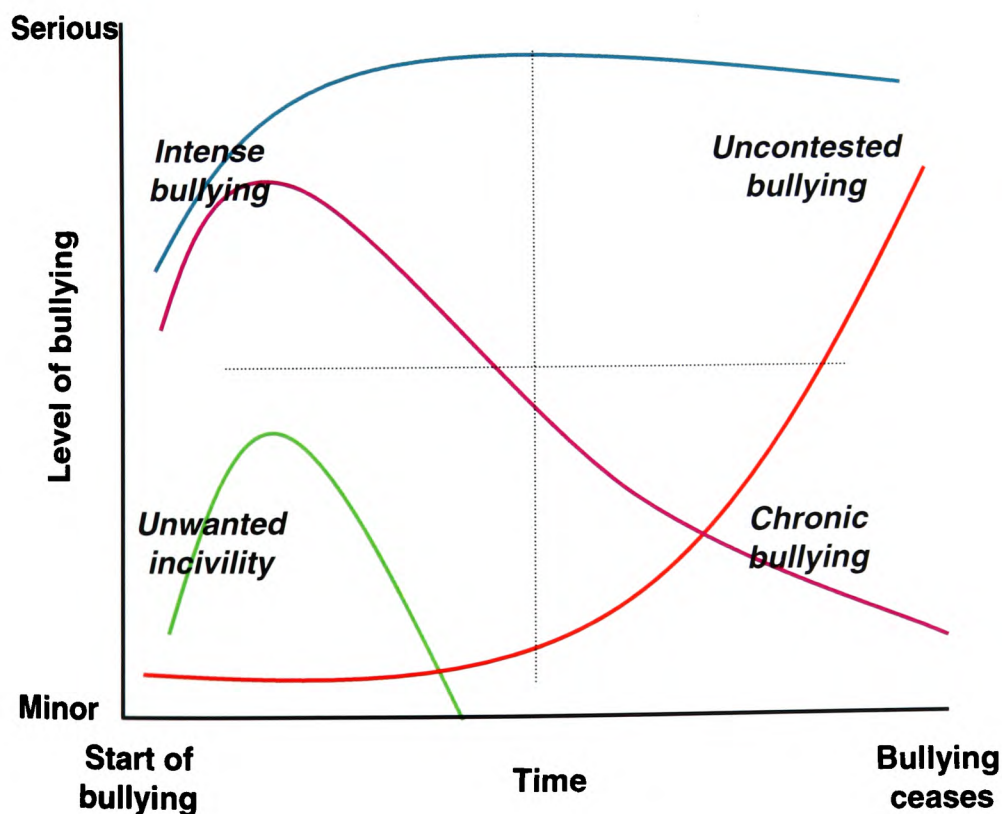


Figure 5.2: Possible chronologies of workplace bullying episodes

In attempting to simulate possible scenarios in the chronology of workplace bullying episodes, the author aims to assess what potential impact this may have in the role played by the Acas helpline advisor during an intervention with a

caller. Similar to the comment above, it is assumed that the caller may not necessarily be a target of workplace bullying. The figure is now explained in some detail.

The blue line depicts a bullying episode characterised by intensity over a short period of time that is sustained and not addressed through, for example, policies within the organisation. This may be a new employee who is ridiculed by an existing team member immediately upon their arrival in the organisation. The intensity of the bullying escalates quickly as the vitriol accumulates onto the target of the bullying. The organisation either refutes any allegation or actively or passively condones the behaviour leading to a situation where the bullying behaviour prevails unaddressed.

The violet line represents escalating bullying practices that are addressed by policies in the organisation and resolved over a period of time. For example, a bullying episode begins and escalates as the target feels unable to defend herself/ himself. The episode is brought to the attention of the organisation who addresses the situation. Having escalated over a period of time, the bullying does not simply cease and the relationship between the parties involved in the bullying discourse require a significant time before what may be considered a normal working environment returns.

The red line represents what may be considered endemic or chronic bullying that grows steadily worse over a period of time and is not addressed by the organisation or indeed the individual who is the subject of the bullying behaviour. The bullying could have started as mild but consistent incivility. The target of the bullying may have tolerated the behaviour and treatment for a significant period of time, however, eventually becomes more affected by the behaviour or the bullying behaviour deteriorates and the impact to the target of the bullying becomes more serious.

The green line represents a case of workplace bullying that has been quickly identified by either the target of the workplace bullying or the organisation. Swift implementation of appropriate policies results in a timely cessation of the bullying.

Could the various indicative representations of workplace bullying illustrated in this model assist in understanding the role Acas may play in differing circumstances? Would the intervention take place at different times in the chronology of the bullying episode? This thesis does not aim to determine empirical responses to these questions. However, it is claimed that this research should consider the timing of the intervention in understanding the role that Acas may play in cases of intervention. It seems feasible that the role of the Acas helpline advisor could be affected by the point in time when the intervention takes

place relative to the life stage point of the workplace bullying episode. For example, the needs of the caller (the target of the bullying) are likely to be different depending on the profile of the bullying episode and the point in time that they call Acas. It is important to note that the chronology of the workplace bullying episode is an enabler for the model to represent the life stage of the bullying episode and the role that Acas may play at the various times depicted.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 have been conceptualised by the author. It is important to contrast them with models developed through previous research into workplace bullying to determine how a resulting theoretical frame may be conceived for this thesis. Keashly and Fisher (1990), cited in Keashly and Nowell (2003) provide a useful table that illustrates the stages of conflict escalation. The table conceptualises the discourses the target of the bullying may experience. This conceptualisation encompasses relationships and communications which are important considerations as they may be influencing factors in the catalyst that triggers a call to Acas, which in turn may influence the role the Acas helpline advisor may be called upon to fulfil.

Dimensions of conflict				
Stage	Communication/ Interaction	Perceptions/ Relationship	Issues	Outcome/ Management
I. Discussion	Discussion/ Debate	Accurate/trust, respect, commitment	Interests	Joint gain/ mutual decision
II. Polarisation	Less direct/ deeds not words	Stereotypes/ other still important	Relationship	Compromise/ negotiation
III. Segregation	Little direct/ threats	Good vs. evil/ distrust, lack of respect	Basic needs	Win-lose/ defensive competition
IV. Destruction	Non-existent/ direct attacks	Other non- human/ hopeless	Survival	Lose-lose/ destruction

Table 5.1: Dimensions of conflict, Fisher and Keashly (1990), in Keashly and Nowell (2003, p.350)

Reviewing the above table column and row headers, could these categories be mapped onto the chart provided above in Figure 5.2? If this were achieved, it seems feasible that an improved model that could help illustrate the role Acas may play in an intervention may become apparent. For example, the support needs of a target of workplace bullying that may be experiencing the symptoms described in row I could be very different to those in row IV. Additionally, the outcome that the caller may be seeking may differ significantly.

In the early stages of bullying, the caller may wish to seek a return to a more harmonious working environment. This suggestion is consistent with Gibbons (2007) who advocates early dispute resolution. By the latter stages, they may be seeking advice for legal redress. If the needs of the target are different, could the role that Acas is expected to fulfil in these differing scenarios be different? Whilst it is stressed that this portrayal is not a prescriptive solution or conclusion that could be generalised in a scientific manner, it is proffered that it may contribute to understanding the role Acas fulfils through conceptualising the experiences of the target of the bullying episode.

Keashly and Fisher (1990) pursue the model illustrated in Table 5.1 by developing a contingency model, shown below in Figure 5.3. Whilst the evolution of the contingency model from the original conflict escalation model seems to be somewhat limited in its development, Keashly and Fisher's model, (1990) advances the conflict escalation model in table 5.1 by offering the channels for redress that may be available and appropriate to the involved parties as the bullying episode evolves and the needs and desires set within it change, illustrating the increasing level of severity of treatment and limited choice that is presented.

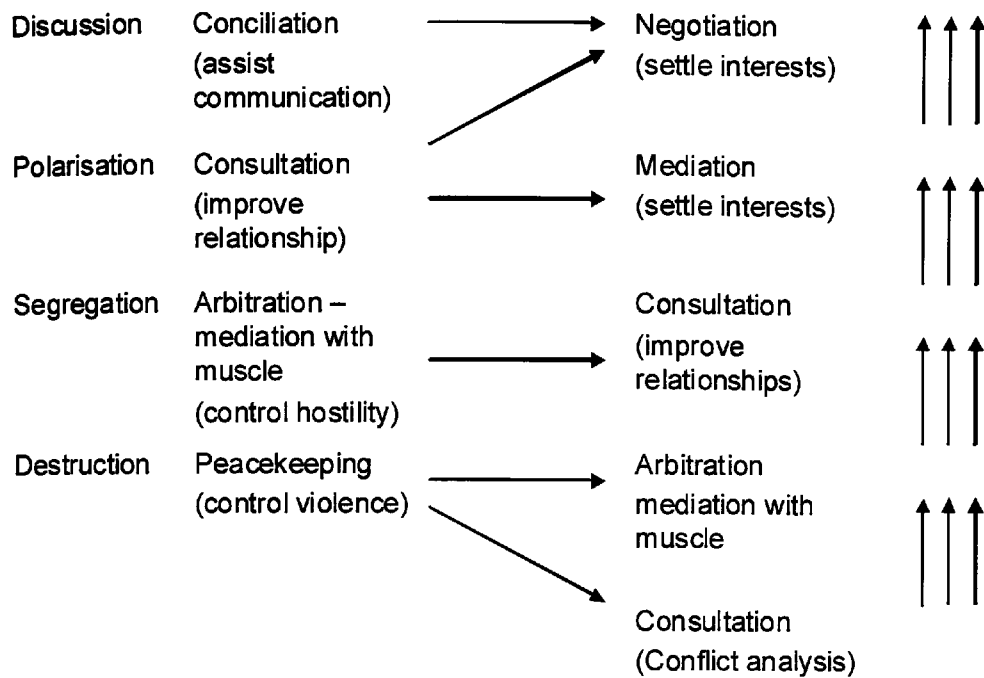


Figure 5.3: Conflict Escalation Model, Keashly and Fisher (1990)

Rayner (2005), informed by Heinrich (1931) who formulated a safety or accident pyramid, has modified his model, coining the term ‘the event hierarchy’. Figure 3.4 depicts this model. The model relates to differing stages of the bullying episode. It may relate to a chronology, and illustrates the escalation that may take place over a period of time. Of particular importance to this thesis, Rayner (2005) identifies a zone within the model where intervention takes place. Examining the categorisation within the event hierarchy where, according to Rayner (2005) intervention takes place, could this also contribute to understanding the role that Acas may play via their telephone helpline?

Possibly the most important context in responding to this question is the point made by Rayner, relating to Heinrich (1931) who reported that for every fatality, there were 29 minor injuries and 300 unsafe acts. If this method is adapted contextualising it to suit workplace bullying, what could be happening in workplaces before Acas are contacted and what impact does this have on the role they may be expected to fulfil? For example, is there a point in the workplace bullying discourse that needs to be reached before third party intervention is typically engaged? This model may help formalise how this concept is represented in this thesis and also contribute to a theoretical frame.

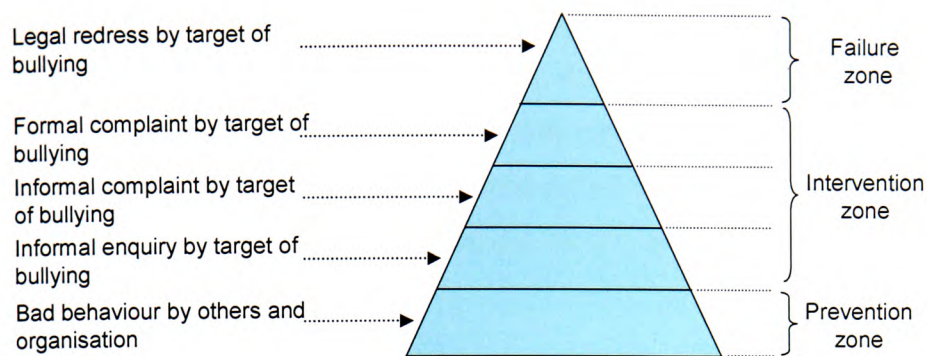


Figure 3.4: The Event Hierarchy, Rayner (2005, p.62)

Combining the contingency model with the conflict escalation model from Keashly and Fisher (1990), and Rayner's (2005) event hierarchy, there appears to be an opportunity to employ these models where the role of Acas may be superimposed to develop a theoretical frame. Can the stages in Keashly and Nowell's (1990) conflict escalation model, their contingency model and Rayner's (2005) event hierarchy relate to the quadrants depicted in figure 5.2? Could the role that Acas plays in an intervention be superimposed onto these models?

This opportunity appears to be viable providing the research here reported determines that the role fulfilled by Acas is dynamic, depends on factors dictated by the caller, and is also influenced by the helpline advisor depending on the experiences they may have witnessed with other similar callers or broader life encounters. If this is the case, then an evolution of Keashly and Nowell's (1990) contingency model may result in an appropriate theoretical frame that can contribute to understanding the role that third parties play in intervention in cases of workplace bullying.

Summary

This chapter initially set out to investigate the phenomenon of intervention. It has been shown that intervention is a concept that has many meanings in differing academic schools. Even when restricting the boundary and focusing intervention on workplace bullying, it is apparent that it cannot be isolated as a phenomenon insulated from other factors and discourses in organisational life. Intervention has

been shown to take place at organisational, group and individual levels via a range of entities, none of which appear to be generalisable in scientific terms. Intervention has been shown to be a phenomenon that may not easily be prescribed or controlled due to the many intervening occasions that may be presented. These interventions may be executed by trained professionals such as counsellors or may be a friend of relation possessing an emotional engagement with the target of the bullying episode.

To fully appreciate what intervention may mean to the various people engaged in a workplace bullying episode an inquiry is required into social identity, the identity of the self and the role emotions play in interventions where Acas may be engaged via their helpline. This assertion contributes to the author's argument that the study of intervention at the individual level in a field such as workplace bullying to understand the phenomenon, may only be possible through an interpretive lens adopting an epistemology congruent with qualitative research. The unique complexities of emotions held by not only the caller but also the advisor leads to situations which cannot be generalised. Finally, a number of models have been offered that may be relevant to this thesis and contribute to a theoretical frame resulting from the research which will help affirm and illustrate the significant contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes in the field of workplace bullying. These models contribute to the understanding and contextualisation of workplace bullying. Having set out the context of intervention, the philosophical frame and the theoretical frames that inform this thesis, the next chapter will discuss, explain and justify the methodology adopted.

Chapter 6: Research Methodology

Chapter Introduction

This chapter is in two parts. The first part will address the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the methodology. This will incorporate framing the epistemological and ontological perspectives from which this thesis is written. The philosophical traditions adopted by the researcher will be presented and juxtaposed with the dominant philosophical traditions of the workplace bullying research school. The contrasting philosophies will be discussed and compared to the approach taken in this thesis. It is important to make comparisons with the research that has preceded this thesis in order for the researcher and reader to consider where in the workplace bullying debate this work is situated and how it makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge.

A critical review of the philosophy adopted by the researcher will be made. This is a valuable exercise to conduct. First, it provides the reader with an explanation of the philosophical tradition from which this thesis is being written. Second, it provides the researcher with an opportunity to critically reflect on the philosophical tradition adopted, its benefits, and limitations, and provide the reader with a perspective that does not necessarily purport to represent the philosophy as a utopia. Third, it further grounds the thesis in the philosophical tradition espoused by the researcher which may help the reader gain a more valuable benefit from the work.

The way in which a significant contribution to knowledge and practice is made by this thesis will also be investigated in this chapter. This will comprise a review of the aims and objectives of this thesis discussed in Chapter 1. An evaluation of these aims and objectives in conjunction with an assessment of the methodology employed will be made. The purpose of this appraisal is to establish and demonstrate the academic rigour taken to ensure the research methodology is appropriate and that the aims and objectives of the thesis can be satisfied through the use of the methodology chosen. Furthermore, an explanation and justification will be made to explain why other methodologies were rejected.

The second part of this chapter will study the research design approach. This focuses on the practical aspects of conducting the research. Such practicality encompasses several facets of the methodology that will be discussed in detail. These include the sampling frame and the justification for the decisions made in selecting the organisation; the participants involved; ethics; consent; data capture; data storage and data destruction; techniques for analysis and reasons for selection. Justification will also be provided that illustrates why other analytical methods were rejected. Finally, a review of the practicalities of conducting this type of research will be offered with a critical reflection on the benefit and limitations of the methods chosen.

The Aim of the Study

Chapter one described the aims of this thesis. It is worthwhile recounting them here for clarity and to provide an opportunity to contextualise them with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks employed in the research methodology.

- 1) What role do Acas helpline advisors fulfil in providing third party intervention support for victims of workplace bullying?
- 2) What realities are constructed by Acas helpline employees in the roles they fulfil providing support to victims of workplace bullying?
- 3) What other associated realities are constructed by Acas helpline employees in their working life?

In order to understand critically the above questions and to answer them, careful attention must be paid to the philosophical approach adopted by the researcher.

Conceptual Theoretical Model

The literature review in Chapter two provided some indications that the dominant philosophical school in workplace bullying research is positivist and objective in nature. It is argued in this thesis that workplace bullying is an emotive term that can manifest itself in many different ways depending on the context in which a person may talk or think about the phenomenon of workplace bullying. This

argument is postulated on the premise that workplace bullying is a manifestation of interpersonal relationships. Such emotional discourses as relationships are subject to variability that probably cannot be tested using techniques that demand validity and reliability as key tenets of the research tradition. Positivist approaches to workplace bullying research, whilst beneficial in providing researchers with signposts that illuminate many areas of interest, may be less robust in terms of understanding the phenomenon.

The researcher postulates that attempting to provide objective and empirical answers to research questions in workplace bullying research without understanding the context of the reality created by the people within their own discourses may be flawed. This perspective may be endorsed by an increasing number of active researchers in the workplace bullying debate such as Lewis (2004), Sheehan (2004), Liefhoghe (2001) and Liefhoghe (1999). They have built, and continue to build, a body of knowledge that complements the dominant positivist academic research that pervades workplace bullying research debates.

Chapter 2 explained that the interpretive and subjective research traditions are now playing a larger role in workplace bullying research and cited Hoel and Beale (2006) who stated that the qualitative approach associated with the social science philosophy (e.g., Liefhoghe, 2003, Lewis and Rayner, 2003 and Sjøtveit, 1992) 'does open up new angles to the debate'. Rayner, Sheehan and Barker (1999 p.13) claim it is imperative to understand the processes of 'making sense' of workplace bullying within the working population at large. Why does an interpretivist approach to this thesis provide a valuable contribution to the way in which knowledge is created?

In order to address the aims and objectives of this research, it is argued that it is essential and fundamental for one to critically explore the interactions that exist between those involved in the discourses to understand the realities they create through their relationships. What relationship exists between Acas and callers who claim to be subjects of workplace bullying? What realities have been created in both parties' minds in understanding the notion of workplace bullying and the role that intervention plays? Understanding the social construction that is created

between people may help researchers better understand the role of and for intervention strategies. Furthermore, such an understanding may help define factors that need to be addressed to enable Acas to provide a better service and for alleged subjects of workplace bullying to receive effective support.

Could these goals be achieved using a positivist approach to this research? It is argued that the research goals would not be achieved as positivist research principles aim to provide answers, but do not necessarily aim to understand the reality in which that answer exists. If this is the case, then it is argued that the context of the answer is absent from the knowledge gained. Further, the notion of positivism does not represent 'voices'.

The notion of voices in the context of workplace bullying relates to the influences that help actors shape their social reality of the phenomenon. Lewis (2003) explores voices and offers that many voices may be active in the workplace bullying discourse. These may include printed media, journals, trade unions, as well as work colleagues and those facets in the organisation associated with workplace bullying such as policies and procedures. The notion of voices therefore is argued herein to be of significant importance to this thesis. This thesis then espouses the traditions of social construction adopting an interpretivist stance, which may leverage a greater understanding of the workplace bullying environment.

The ability to understand the notion of third party intervention in workplace bullying is central to the conceptual theoretical model of this thesis. It is important to piece together further the conceptual theoretical model at this juncture. This will satisfy two particular relevant points that need to be addressed in justifying the methodological approach. First, consideration will be given to the epistemological and ontological perspectives from which this thesis is written. This will include a narrative that explains how the researcher perceives the research subject. Second, a critical review will be undertaken to determine the suitability of the methodology to meet the aims and objectives.

Liefooghe and Olafsson (1999 p.41) provide an interesting and relatively balanced argument in support of what they term the 'amateur perspective.' They purport that the lay person holds knowledge in the form of common sense theories about aspects of life and society which are informed by scientific disciplines. Liefooghe and Olafsson add that the knowledge lay persons develop around workplace bullying are not objective realities, but are conceptualised as a set of events. The notion of 'conceptualised events' may be interpreted to have some similarities in meaning to 'constructed realities.' It is unclear from Liefooghe and Olafsson's paper whether their view was influenced by the theories of social construction.

Liefooghe and Olafsson seem to have been influenced by theorists such as Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) and Jaspars and Fraser (1984) who discuss the transformation of scientific knowledge into a form of 'common sense knowledge' that results from lay persons consuming and making sense of the science through social interaction. Abercrombie et al (2000) contest that social construction has two meanings. First, that from a generic perspective, it is a term that refers to the study of the social world that insists on social explanation. Second, and more importantly in the context here, they add that it is social construction that refers to the process that people actively construct their social world rather than having it imposed upon them.

Social construction has its roots in interpretive sociology, with a primary concern in understanding the subjective experience of individuals, (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p.253). Denzin and Lincoln (2003 p.35) explain the constructivist paradigm by postulating that it holds a relativist ontology (that there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings) and a naturalistic (set in the natural world) set of methodological procedures.

It is argued by the author that we inhabit a socially constructed world where multiple realities are created by individuals through many discourses including experiences, relationships, upbringing, values, and assumptions. That is not to infer that each of these factors are 'empirically accurate', 'exact', 'precise or 'correct'; rather that the interpretation of the discourse may well be unique to that

individual and therefore their interpretation of the 'empirical accuracy' of the event will be theirs and theirs alone.

Burr (2003, p.81) states clearly that the absence of an ultimate truth is the foundation upon which the theoretical framework of social construction is built. Burr adds that social construction seeks to emphasise relativism, that is, that realities that are experienced cannot be judged absolutely. Rather, each reality is referenced with another reality, which itself has been compared to many others, thereby rejecting the notion that there is an absolute standard upon which each reality is judged.

Gergen (1999, p.11) captures what is argued by the author to be a central tenet of social construction when he questions the century of research conducted by psychologists with the most rigorous methods in an attempt to seek 'answers'. Gergen's assertion is to challenge the notion that the mind acts like a mirror to nature. What Gergen seems to mean by this argument is that if the mind does not translate with accuracy and consistency what nature exposes, then the result from the experience is contested by some commentators to have been 'made up'. Gergen's conclusion to this argument appears to be that if individuals' diversities and translations of experiences are not held by philosophers and academics to be worthwhile, then the very idea of individual knowledge could appear to be on the verge of disintegration.

Taking Gergen's arguments and contextualising these with the notion of intervention, dyadic intervention or intervention at an individual level may be a futile exercise because the interpretation of the situation would have a uniform explanation. In cases of workplace bullying, is it reasonable to assume that the Acas helpline advisor's interpretation would be the same as the individual making the call? It is here argued that such an approach could be an extreme representation of empiricism and fails to appreciate the unique attributes that any individual may hold in any given experience of the world.

Why does there remain a tension within the workplace bullying debate around the agreement of a uniform definition? There seems to be a need to offer some

explanation as to why the unique nature of workplace bullying experiences lead to a much personalised account of the discourses. It is likely that the experiences within the discourse are unique in some ways and therefore dyadic intervention is beneficial to address the specific context of the episode experienced by that individual.

The way in which reality or description is represented is argued by Potter (2000, p.35) to be through language between individuals, 'with ad hoc criteria in idiosyncratic circumstances and dealt in an opportunistic manner'. He adds that it is through words that we communicate what we take to be true. Does this representation of language have resonance with intervention in cases of workplace bullying? Certainly, it seems feasible that the conditions upon which intervention takes place are likely to be relatively unpredictable in terms of frequency, context and nature, or as Potter described 'ad hoc'.

The reactive nature of seeking support supports the 'ad hoc' nature described by Potter. The behaviour of the bully or the bullied party may be considered idiosyncratic, depending upon to what it is being compared. The opportunism of the interaction would possibly have been predicated by the bullying episode. Whilst it is not appropriate to create a circumstance in this thesis to accommodate definitions and scholarly commentary, it is here argued that Potter (2000) does offer some valuable guidance in understanding how language could be a conduit for facilitating intervention in cases of workplace bullying.

Burr (2003) contests that the principal method for understanding and the unit of analysis in social construction is language. She argues that language, rather than simply describing the world as the actor perceives it, both constructs the world and has real consequences. The research reported here is particularly concerned with the use of language in understanding the realities created by Acas employees in the role they play in providing third party intervention in cases of workplace bullying. The role language plays is heightened in this situation as the interaction is conducted by telephone; therefore the impacts associated with a physical meeting are absent.

Further, in considering the role of language, it is argued by the author to be important to consider the language of what may be termed the periphery of the debate. The periphery may include discussions between Acas employees about calls taken, the caller themselves, overhearing colleagues on calls and influences from outside the workplace such as families. Finally, language may be apparent in policy documents and training materials that pertain to the phenomenon of workplace bullying.

The reason that language is argued to be important in this research is because it appears that third party intervention in workplace bullying has not yet been researched. Gergen (1999) offers that language and words cannot accurately portray the world, although the words used may not be wrong. He suggests that the words used should be 'an invitation' to deliberate on the meaning of the words offered. The recipient manipulates and refines the words heard or written into a knowledge that is predicated on the knowledge that the recipient already possesses. Gergen's argument appears to accommodate well the notion of intervention.

In cases of individual intervention such as those of workplace bullying, the person catalysing the intervention or the recipient of the intervention would offer descriptions of the circumstances they are experiencing. Each party could be argued to be 'inviting' the other to subscribe to the language and words being offered in an attempt to formulate meaning. Language provides a means by which the researcher can explore the subject in question through participant interaction to gain an understanding of the subject. This approach may be deemed appropriate when there is an apparent lack of previous research in the area. It is argued here that there is a lack of knowledge and research on interventions for workplace bullying.

There are other facets that possibly influence the discourse. Burr (2003) contests that ideology may play a role in determining the discourse that ensues from the point of intervention. Ideology may be defined as a set of beliefs and thoughts whether tightly or loosely bounded that form a set (Abercrombie et al 2000). Burr (2003) pursues this definition, drawing on the French philosopher Althusser

(1918-1990), adding that ideology extends to the way in which the beliefs and thoughts are played out in social interaction. That is she adds, ideology is a 'lived experience'.

Workplace bullying has been identified as a cultural phenomenon, (Archer 1999). Is the ideology that Burr refers to inherent in an organisation's culture, which is then played out in workplace bullying discourses? Burr (2003) also offers that ideology may be described as a 'false consciousness' where the individual becomes self-deceiving of the environment which they inhabit. Could such a false consciousness exist in organisations where line managers have been empowered to deal with people issues rather than engaging the traditional HR specialist (Lewis and Rayner, 2003)? Are managers in organisations living a false consciousness whereby they are self-deceiving of an environment whose personal ideology of HRM may actually encourage a culture of workplace bullying? A possible reason for the self-deceiving reality that may be constructed is because of power differences, (Burr, 2003). Drawing upon Thompson, (1990), Burr contests that the mobilisation of meaning in the social world is determined by those with greatest power. In turn, the powerful meanings become points of reference for individuals.

In the context of this thesis, the concept of ideology appears to be enshrined within the theory of social construction, and is an important consideration when examining how the intervention episode is revealed. If the complex ethnomethodological approach to ideology described above is applied to the situation involving an Acas helpline advisor and a caller who is the subject of workplace bullying, it appears likely that whilst the possible discourses may be described, it may be unfeasible to make bounded statements in any way.

For example, drawing on the aforementioned arguments, the researcher would have to give consideration to many factors that may be inherent within the discourse. These may include the language used in the initial interaction, the reasons for the language chosen, the discourses that may not be apparent or evident from exchange of words and the power dynamic that could possibly exist between the subject of the bullying, the bully, and/or employer and the dyadic

relationship between the caller and the helpline advisor. This convoluted potential set of circumstances illustrates the complexity of the role that Acas plays when intervening in cases of workplace bullying and brings into focus the depth of inquiry that is required in an attempt to achieve the aim of the thesis through the epistemological lens that has been adopted.

Numerous theoretical approaches could be adopted to examine intervention. For example, psychological traditions exist that employ intervention in a clinical context (for example in healthcare, see Halladay and Bero, 2000). This approach has been rejected as the foundation of the psychological traditions do not facilitate the research to concentrate on the individual and the subjective nature of inquiry that it is argued by the author as fundamental in addressing the aims of the thesis. In taking an interpretive approach to understand the meaning of intervention, based on the principles of social construction, the author argues that intervention at the organisational level may be limited in its thoroughness of effectiveness, as different people will react to the intervention in different ways.

For example, a typical online event, such as an intranet communication bulletin aiming to highlight and raise awareness of the issue of workplace bullying may result in multiple interpretations from individuals. These interpretations may depend on the way they encounter other relevant experiences in the workplace, for example, who they are, what their experience at work has been, what previous experiences they have had, and what relationships they have at work. Interventions that may have greatest impact may be those that have a quantifiable input and output at a relatively large scale. That is, they affect large numbers of people in a relatively constant and uniform manner, for example an intervention to change process, governance or management. This again is because the reality constructed by individuals in organisations will treat the intervention(s) differently depending on a myriad of factors in each person's unique circumstances.

This postulation appears to be contrary to the majority of the literature that explores interventions, such as organisational transformation, organisational learning and training in organisations, for example, (Fagenson-Elland, 2004, Giga

et al, 2003, Rahim, 2002 and Kilmann and Herden, 2001). Whilst some researchers take an interpretive approach to intervention, (for example, Heracleous and Marshak, 2004 and Sarker et al 2006), it appears that a positivist dominance in the literature is apparent, with the focus applied at the organisational level. That is, the author refers to the organisation as both the apparatus of intervention and the subject of the intervention.

Whilst Hoel and Giga's (2006) example of research is relevant in terms of being centred on workplace bullying and intervention, it is important to note that its usefulness to this thesis is likely to be limited as the research was organisationally focused and adopted a positivist epistemology. The position adopted by Hoel and Giga does not mean their research is unsound. Rather, the assumptions made about the objective nature of the organisation do not necessarily correspond in an appropriate manner to satisfy the traditions of social construction. The role of the qualitative, interpretive researcher occupies a different location to that of the empiricist. This thesis' aim would probably not be reached employing positivist traditions. A social construction approach to this thesis is argued to support the aim and enables the researcher to use a tool kit that is equipped to understand a phenomenon such as workplace bullying and not necessarily generalise.

Is the level of evidence in the literature and previous similar research about workplace bullying sufficiently comparable to be able to draw upon it as a basis from which to commence this thesis? Is there generally accepted, validated, and reliable research relating to third party intervention that could be leveraged on which to base this thesis? It is argued here that the body of research on workplace bullying is significantly influential and useful in writing this thesis. Chapter three discussed intervention in detail and it is evident that a significant amount of research concerning intervention strategies exists that provides valuable contributions and insight for this work. Whilst this work has been influential in guiding the researcher, it does not appear to be sufficiently comparable for this work to build upon.

It is proposed, therefore, that to understand the role Acas plays in providing third party intervention in workplace bullying, the researcher must understand the

realities created by those building policy and strategy, by those who are managing and leading teams of people, and by individuals speaking to callers who claim to be the subject of workplace bullying. Language, as the primary unit of analysis, is important because the variability within the discourses being played out is possibly too great for the researcher to be able to understand and hence contribute to knowledge through empiricist methodologies.

Furthermore, the apparent absence of research in this particular area means that it may be considered reprehensible in some academic research traditions to make assumptions and take for granted certain facets of this research that would possibly be required in adopting a positivist realist methodology. Such assumptions have been made in workplace bullying research where for example, definitions of workplace bullying have been stated to research participants in survey instruments. Such an approach in an investigative research exercise may risk precluding aspects of the discourses because the participant has been conditioned by the methodology to ignore them. As one of the aims of this thesis is to understand the role played by Acas, it is proposed that the research methodology should endeavour to avoid intentionally or unintentionally prescribe components of the discourses that may be relevant in gaining the understanding required to make this thesis as complete as is practically feasible.

The discourses apparent within policies and procedures in the Acas organisation, that are demonstrated in the role they play when providing third party intervention in workplace bullying, are also relevant in justifying the methodological stance of this thesis. In Chapter one, commentary was made regarding the helpline service provided by Acas. Investigations made by the researcher in preparation for this thesis suggested that the majority of the training given to those employees communicating directly with callers to Acas' helpline was descriptive in its nature; there were few prescriptive processes that had to be followed, (for example, for specific legal requirements). Rather, the emphasis appears to be on being able to interpret the caller's needs and take the most relevant appropriate action in reply. The researcher contests that the interpretation made by, and the actions executed by, the advisor are a result of the realities the helpline advisor constructs in their discourse with the caller. The next section of this chapter will

provide an appropriate level of assurance regarding the rigour of the research method.

Research Methods

Silverman (2001 p61) cites Wolcott (1990) and makes a clear point in stating that the qualitative researcher's method should aim 'to do less, more thoroughly'. Remenyi et al (1998) counsel that non positivist research relies upon the researcher collecting evidence in as natural a setting as possible, rejecting the demands for the formalism required by positivism. This second guiding principle forms an integral part of the research method process in this thesis. In adopting this stance however, caution must be taken to acknowledge the risks that non-positivist researchers are faced with in gathering qualitative data.

One of the risks that should be noted at the outset of this section of Chapter Five is what Morgan (1980) cited in Remenyi et al (1998 p.100) calls the researcher's 'frame of reference' or 'mode of engagement'. These terms refer to prejudices, cultural beliefs, values, biases and experience the researcher brings to the research exercise. It is contested that to eliminate deeply held personal characteristics such as values and attitudes is not a feasible option for the researcher. Gaining an appropriate understanding of the research subject in a phenomenological way demands a level of access that is not generally required in quantitative research.

Access to Research Subjects

The levels of access required to conduct qualitative research requires that the researcher has physical, usually face to face contact with participants. The research setting for this exercise is described as a closed setting where access is controlled by 'gatekeepers' (Silverman 2001, p.57). This was achieved by the appropriate engagement of senior management staff at Acas through the author's own academic institution. This approach gave credibility to the request for access and arguably resulted in a more co-operative organisation for the researcher based on expectations set by commentators (for example, Gill and Johnson, 2002, p.133).

Following numerous telephone conversations and written explanations of the research exercise, permission was granted to approach various categories of staff. These included helpline advisors, telephone mediation advisors, operational managers, strategic managers and leaders and directors. The staff members targeted are located at numerous UK based sites in the South and South East of England and in South East Wales. The reason for targeting these various groups of staff forms part of the sampling strategy.

Sampling Strategy

Remenyi et al (1998 p.193) asserts that one of the first considerations in research sampling strategy is to obtain a definition of the population to be studied, which constitutes the sampling frame. The author established that in this research, the sampling frame could be explained by detailing the population size, its role, and its location. This is represented in Table 6.1 below, sampling frame.

Location	Population	Role		
		Helpline Advisors	Telephone mediation	Conciliation services
Fleet	20	✓	✓	✓
Bristol	18	✓	✓	✓
Cardiff	11	✓	✓	
Birmingham	14	✓		✓

Table 6.1: Sampling frame

Non-probability sampling was concluded as an appropriate method of determining the sample. This is because there is no requirement for statistically valid random sampling, that access was limited to the operational demands placed on the helpline, (such as the volume of calls being received whilst the research was being conducted), and that specific roles within the helpline organisation needed to be targeted to ensure the research provided was balanced in its data collection. Additionally, this research sampling strategy is also predicated upon the principle

of 'theoretical sampling' (Silverman, 2001, p.251), a term which is also referred to as purposeful sampling. Silverman cites Mason (1996, p.93-4) who claims:

Theoretical sampling means selecting your groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research question[s], your theoretical position ... and most importantly the explanation or account which you are developing. Theoretical sampling is concerned with constructing a sample ... which is meaningful theoretically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test your theory and explanation.

The researcher also endeavoured to ensure that the sampling strategy contained judgement samples (Remenyi et al 1998, p.194). Remenyi describes these samples as individuals who are selected for a specific purpose, for example, representing best practice in a particular issue. This was the case in selecting certain policy makers because of their relationships and the experience they have with Government, industry, and the trades union movement. Avoiding adhering to the author's agenda was an important part of the sampling strategy. This led to sampling flexibility (Silverman 2001, p.253) during the research, to ensure that subjects with potentially valuable contributions were contacted. This was achieved using a 'snowball or chain' strategy in each participant encounter.

Types of Data Collected

The data collected was largely contingent upon the feasibility of the participants to contribute. For example, it may have been possible to create online secure discussion forums. Given the constraints of this research exercise, however, for example, time, money and resource to facilitate such emerging practices, such novel options were dismissed. Conventional interviewing and focus groups were the source of data. These resulted in recorded electronic audio files being generated by the author during all participant sessions. The audio files were copied to CD media and transcribed into documents.

Pilot Interviews

Remenyi et al (1998 p.111) and Cresswell (2007 p.133) influenced the researcher in the process of ensuring appropriate pilot procedures were adopted. Piloting of the interviews took place in two parts. First, the researcher's supervisory team was engaged to review the interview plan. A copy of this document is provided at Appendix B2. Second, a pilot interview for the helpline advisor participant population was conducted with an operational manager. This was undertaken on the basis that the manager would both be able to answer the questions knowledgeably and additionally, following the interview, provide feedback to the researcher.

This feedback included the clarity and comprehension of the questions, the researcher's expectations in terms of answers, the time taken to complete the interview and the relevance and comprehensiveness of the questions asked. The feedback provided was considered and amendments made to the interview questions and running order. Following these changes, additional feedback was sought from the researcher's supervisory team and the pilot participant with some minor changes being made, mainly of a procedural and administrative nature.

Semi Structured Interviews

Semi structured, face to face, one-on-one interviews were conducted using the interview guide at Appendix B2. The researcher was introduced to the participants by their manager prior to being interviewed. This was deemed by the author to be an important social event in an attempt to remove any concern that may be held by the participants. At each location and for each interview, a suitable room was secured where privacy was assured. Further, noise levels were considered. This was because each interview was audio recorded using an electronic recording device. Participants were formally requested for their permission to record the interviews. The details of the request may be found on the Participant Information Sheet, provided to each participant by the author, at Appendix B. The interviews were planned to last no more than 45 minutes. In practice the elapsed recording time of interview sessions varied between 28 and 57 minutes.

Semi structured interviews were used to gain an insight into the personal realities constructed by participants. It was felt that due to the nature of some of the questions, a one-on-one setting may be more conducive to obtaining a richer contribution than in a focus group setting. Furthermore, following advice from Acas, it was apparent that helpline advisors were drawn from many different backgrounds and walks of life. This particular attribute of the sample population was considered important as it may highlight different realities constructed because of external influence. Whilst the available literature used to guide the researcher did not seem to offer specific comment in this regard, the principles of social construction values the uniqueness of the individual and therefore this element of the adopted research method appeared to connect well with the methodology.

The interviews with operational employee participants were different from those with senior manager, policy maker, and strategist participants. This reflected the difference in the role they play within Acas. For example, it was believed to be relatively futile in asking a senior manager how he/she dealt with calls from people who claimed to be subjects of workplace bullying. This assumption, however, had to be balanced with a possibility that the person being interviewed may have listened to a call from a person making such a claim and therefore the opportunity to comment in this regard was made. A number of interview questions may have seemed irrelevant at face value but did need to be tested with participants. The interview guides are located at Appendix B2.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are defined here as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Krueger 1994). Morgan (1997) adds that they are reliant on interaction within the group, based on topics supplied by the researcher who takes on the role of moderator. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest that in qualitative research, the researcher takes on a less directive and dominating role allowing respondents to comment on what they felt was important through their own interaction.

There are important reasons cited that support the author in the reasons why this method of data collection was chosen. First, focus groups are beneficial in exploratory research (Litosseliti, 2003, p.17); that they are useful in supplementing other data or for triangulating it (p.17); and that focus groups are useful in generation, rather than the testing of concepts (p.18). Additionally, it is important to clearly state why focus groups are able to contribute valuable data that could not be acquired in one on one interviews. Morgan (1997) also provides useful and influential insight regarding the suitability and benefit of focus group research. He suggests that the comparisons, whether similarities or differences in group settings, provide rich data for the researcher.

The discussion of the focus group needs to acknowledge that some people may be unwilling to share openly those opinions they feel may not be shared by others, may be private or believed to be intimate to them. For example, in the case of this research this could include the emotional affects that a particular caller caused a helpline operator. Therefore, the emphasis on questioning in the focus groups was constructed in a way that attempted to avoid the risk of inviting answers that may have resulted in a dysfunctional group or a distraught participant.

The participants for the focus groups were selected using the same sampling strategy and frame as for the one on one interview. It was preferred that the participants in the focus groups were different to those in the interviews, however due to operational constraints this was not always possible. Where focus groups were held, appropriate accommodation was selected and the room layout was set to reflect best practice taken from Litosseliti (2003 p.48). Participants were formally requested for their permission to record the interviews. The details and structure of the request may be found on the Participant Information Sheet, provided to each participant by the author, at Appendix B1. The focus groups were planned to last no more than one hour. In practice the elapsed recording time of focus group sessions was 45 and 72 minutes. It was also noted that focus group moderation requires particular skills and techniques. As the author was the moderator, specific time was dedicated to ensuring these skills were understood and practiced using Litosselti (2003), Krueger and Casey (2000) and Morgan

(1997) as guides. It became unfeasible to pilot the focus group model and the researcher's supervisory team were engaged to review it as an alternative means of assessing suitability.

Ethics

The University Non-specialist Ethical Guidelines for Research were adhered to throughout this research. The guidelines were referred to via the University website to ensure the most up to date version was followed. Additionally, texts were studied to review other best practice, for example, Morgan (1997), Remenyi et al (1998), Gummesson (2000), Silverman (2001), Wolcott (2001), Gill and Johnson (2002), Denzin and Lincoln (2003), Litosseliti (2003), and Cresswell (2007).

Every participant was furnished with the Participant Information Sheet contained at Appendix B. The duty of the researcher to ensure 'informed consent' was ensured via the information sheet and through a verbal discussion between the researcher and participant before every interview or focus group. The interview or focus group recordings do not name individuals taking part in the interview. Confidentiality was assured and in the case of focus groups, confidentiality was requested between participants.

There were additional confidentiality issues pertinent to this research that also were considered and addressed. For example, the Acas helpline is confidential and callers' details are not required as a pre-requisite for advice. The researcher was advised, however, that the information divulged in the interviews and focus groups would be considered confidential within Acas and care would be required to ensure that sensitive information pertaining to Acas' work was not inadvertently or inappropriately published by the author. Additionally, interviews with senior managers contained information that could be deemed confidential within the organisation or externally in a socio-political context given Acas' independent status, but equally in its role as part of the UK Civil Service. Where data was recorded by the author that is believed to be confidential, it has been excluded from the discussion, is implicit in the results, but does not compromise the ethical position of the researcher or the trust offered by Acas and its staff.

The data gathered during interviews and focus groups is held by the author on a single Personal Computer and has been recorded to DVD media for back up purposes to ensure the data remains available during the writing of the thesis. One copy of the whole data set was sent to the professional transcription service on a single DVD and this has been returned. The product provided by the transcription service purports to be confidential and the company has a track record in providing academic transcription services. Access to the data is now limited to the author alone and is locked in a secure cabinet. The data will be destroyed five years from the date of original recording in accordance with the University regulations.

Data Analysis Methods

This section of the chapter will provide a detailed and critical perspective on the way in which the researcher has analysed and validated the data. Data validation in qualitative research has long been a subject of much debate between commentators (for examples see Silverman 2001 p.233 and Remenyi et al 1998, citing Gummesson 1991 and Collins and Young 1988). Gergen and Gergen (2003 p.577) robustly contest that if there is no means of matching 'word to world' then the warrant for scientific validity is lost, and researchers are left to question the role of methodology and criteria of evaluation. They add that empiricist emphasis on quantifiable behaviour leaves out the crucial ingredient of human understanding, namely the private experience of the agent, (p.578). Their conclusion (p.604) draws upon Denzin and Lincoln, (1994 p.15) where they observe that the field of qualitative research is defined by a series of tensions, contradictions, and hesitations and has now reached an impasse, (p 585). These comments are relevant to this thesis.

Furthermore, as this is a thesis for a DBA, it is important that the author makes a significant contribution to knowledge that is useful for practitioners as well as the academic community. It seems apparent that management and business communities in the UK have a tendency to search for 'truths'. Theses cannot necessarily satisfy that demand and therefore a conflict emerges between the

acceptance of this research as a practical contribution to knowledge versus its epistemological and ontological rigour as an academic commentary.

Cresswell (2007) presents a possible solution to the author's dilemma. Whilst perhaps significantly more simplified than Denzin and Lincoln (2003), he argues that qualitative researchers strive for 'understanding', where there is a possibility that there is no right answer. Further, he asserts that when questioning validity, the researcher and reader must ask to whose standards, and finally how is the quality of the research judged? (p.201). These questions seem to be Cresswell's way of attempting to bring some clarity and succinctness to the subject and in the course of doing so deal with what appears to be a topic of much academic disagreement.

Analysis Techniques

The analysis of qualitative data is generally recognised as being a laborious, time consuming and probably the most demanding task in the process of the research project. It seems that there is little agreement on a particular perspective and approach in analysing qualitative data, although a number of themes emerge in the literature and these have influenced the approach adopted by the researcher. (For example, see Remenyi et al 1998 p. 112, Cresswell 2007 p.147, Gummesson 2000 p.97, Denzin and Lincoln 2003 p.37 and Silverman 2001 p.179).

The transcripts for all interviews and focus groups was read and re-read a number of times to ensure a consistent and thorough understanding of the data and to 'hear' what participants said (Creswell 2007 p.151). Cresswell's data analysis spiral, (2007 p.151) was used as a model for the ensuing analysis, as shown in Figure 6.1. This is similar to the 'sequential analysis' described by Remenyi et al 1998, p.113 which was also influential in the researcher's analysis method choice. An example of how the data was analysed is included at Appendix C.

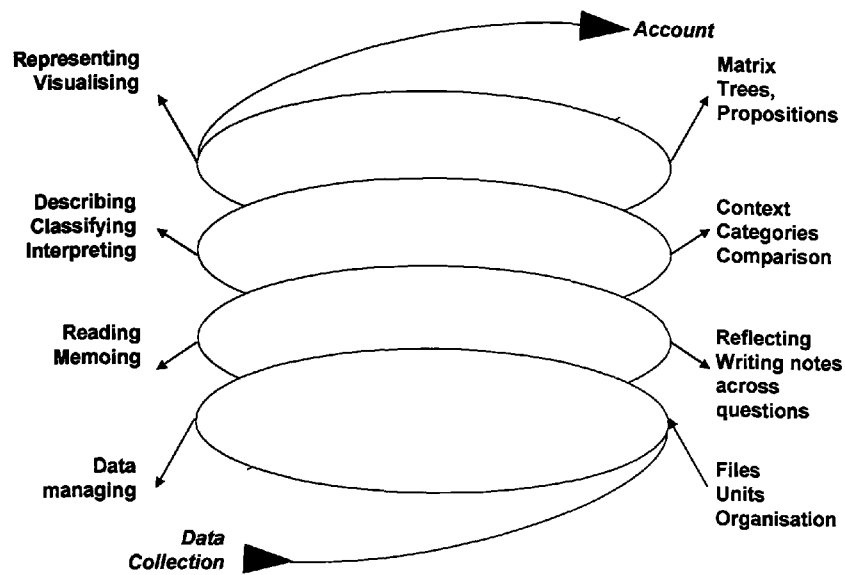


Figure 6.1: The Data Analysis Spiral, Cresswell, 2007, p.151.

The principles of the analysis methods relied upon searching for categories of information relating to the content of the responses. These categories were then distilled into themes. The themes were then analysed to present the narrative in the results in Chapters five, six and seven. There are a number of important points in relation to the approach chosen. The notion of seeking out categories and themes is by its nature limited in terms of the quantities that can readily be analysed. This limitation and its association to positivism, that is, an output determined by frequency may be seen as inappropriate in some qualitative research circles. The author contests that this may not be an important consideration as the purpose of this method is to establish dominant themes in understanding the role Acas plays in third party intervention. Therefore, it is argued here that the understanding benefits from determining areas of commonality amongst respondents.

The identification and selection of categories and themes seems to be a subjective matter. The choices made by the researcher may not be the choice made by others. The selectivity of choosing certain data over others is referred to as 'winnowing' by Cresswell (2007 p.152) who argues that some information may not be used as themes emerge. The quality of the method and practice undertaken

by the researcher is contingent upon reliability and validity factors that will be discussed below.

Another challenge with the method adopted is that it can be construed as content analysis. There does appear to be some relevant differences. Silverman (2001 p.123) argues that content analysis is an accepted method of textual investigation. He asserts that the process of establishing a number of categories and then counting the number of instances of text that fall into those categories can be an appropriate method. Silverman intentionally contradicts his own argument by drawing into question the way in which differing researchers would establish categories and then allocate coded instances of text. This approach conducted in this way is arguably a quantitative method. If this argument is accepted then it is appropriate to suggest that the method should comply with quantitative validity and reliability constructs.

In the case of this research, the aim is not to conduct content analysis through counting frequency of text or subjects. Rather, the aims are to establish the realities created by participants, understand the meaning of their responses and create themes from these analyses.

Validity Considerations

Validity is a term that originated in quantitative research, (Silverman 2001 p.232). Therefore, it is a subject of significant debate whether such terms should be used in qualitative research. This is because the meanings of the terms differ in a qualitative setting. For example, Remenyi et al (1998 p.114) talks of differing yardsticks in terms of validity, reliability, and generalisability in qualitative research, where the terms have a 'softer' meaning, referring to such terms as researcher honesty, design integrity and research consistency. Cresswell (2007 p.206) refers to validation as a means of assessing accuracy in a qualitative setting.

Further Cresswell draws on Angen (2000) who emphasizes validity as a process rather than verification. The notion of truth being linked with validity in the positivist sense is notably absent. Do these terms infer a less robust and

meaningful or credible outcome to the research? Are these terms less valued than those in positivist research? The author urges that that neither points are the case. The value of the outcome of this research is based on an exploratory understanding that attempts to interpret the realities constructed in third party intervention into workplace bullying.

The aim is rather to understand the role played by those involved and not to hypothesise or test a particular characteristic of it. Wolcott (1990) situated the notion of understanding within a broader context of conventional validity. He suggested that instead of the traditional meaning of achieving validation, the goal was to identify critical elements and derive plausible interpretations from those elements.

To attempt to create an understanding of the role played by Acas helpline advisors, the researcher has to have open access to those advisors. This facilitates the researcher's ability to gain access to their knowledge and the meanings of their responses which is considered a pre-requisite for qualitative research validity (Remenyi et al 1998). It is argued here that quality access is a primary concern in an attempt to generate data that is deemed to meet the academic rigour expected. Access was granted to all those requested by the researcher. Additionally, each contact made within Acas was questioned prior to interviewing to determine if other employees could benefit from this research. All recommendations made were pursued and all those contacted agreed to participate.

Considering such descriptive terms relating to a notion of validity as those mentioned above, the author reflects on the rigour of the process adopted in an attempt to create data and ensuing information that could be deemed to be an appropriate representation of the research topic and simultaneously satisfy the research aim. To address these points with credibility, a model constructed by Whittmore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) was selected. There seem to be a number of ways that a qualitative researcher may 'validate' his/her work, (for example see Remenyi et al 1998 p.115 and Silverman 2001 p.248). Whittmore et al (2001 p533) cite four primary criteria for validating qualitative research; credibility – are the results an accurate interpretation of the respondents' meaning; authenticity –

are other voices heard; criticality – is there a critical appraisal of the research; integrity – are the investigators self critical?

The research method addresses these criteria in a rigorous and consistent manner. First, the results, which constitute recorded transcriptions of interviews and focus groups, have been audio recorded verbatim with no selectivity. The accuracy of interpretation is based on the author's consistent approach to the project. The methodological stance has been adhered to throughout the research and after significant consideration over a number of years. The authenticity of the results is argued to be satisfied through the sampling strategy and the search within Acas of those whose voices should be heard. The results of this search were not selectively sampled and all recommendations were followed up. The critical approach to this work is inherent within the framework and requirements for the DBA.

Reliability Considerations

Abercrombie et al (2000) explain the meaning of reliability as the extent to which repeated measurements using the same test produce the same results. Reliability then, it is argued here, similar to validity, is a term associated with empiricist positivism. Reliability in a qualitative context, however, has attracted comment and it appears that particular norms are emerging in qualitative method texts.

Marshall and Rossman (1999), Creswell (2007), Silverman (2001) and Remenyi et al (1998) all discuss the particularistic nature of the research and implicitly therefore the intrinsic difficulty in replicating that research. They advocate discipline in procedure, auditability, evidence collection and storage, (for example field notes), and journals. Silverman (2001 p.226) offers one particular kind of reliability, defined by Kirk and Miller (1986) called synchronic reliability.

Synchronic reliability seems to be a technique associated with ethnography; however, its application appears appropriate in this research. This method requires the researcher to assess the similarity of observations within the same period. In the case of this research, such an approach has been adopted. This has been achieved by conducting interviews and focus groups at different locations

over a short time period with groups of participants who do the same job and have had the same training. Further, in the case of policy makers, strategic and operational line managers, participants have been selected and interviewed at differing locations within a short time period.

The reliability of the interviews and focus groups meet the requirements suggested by Silverman (2001 p.229). He asserts that the questions asked should be understood in the same way by each participant. Such a notion cannot be met by the researcher with any form of guarantee. However, the questions were constructed and tested based on a guiding principle that they used plain, simple language, that was aimed not be open to multiple interpretations.

Further, the reliability of interviews as a technique in qualitative research is also dependent on the accurate and consistent coding of responses by the author, (for examples see Remenyi et al (1998) p.115-6, Silverman (2001) p.230, and Cresswell (2007) p. 210). These commentators all implore the use of structured coding and interpretation techniques. This includes keeping records of the interpretations made, the codes used and the analysis conducted. These practices were adhered to as well as the researcher 'rehearsing' them with the supervisory team.

The generalisability of this research has also been considered. This has been achieved in this thesis by combining qualitative research with quantitative methods of population, (Silverman 2001 p.249). Silverman purports that through ensuring the sample size and selection is appropriate, inference may be made to a larger population. The aim of this thesis is to understand the role Acas plays in third party intervention in workplace bullying. The allegation made by the author in this research, therefore, is that the sample interviewed provided responses that are generalisable across the whole Acas organisation.

The above narrative has reflected on the methods that may be adopted in qualitative research to demonstrate 'quality'. The researcher is required to provide evidence that the methods adopted is commensurate with recognised practices (this research does not aim to answer what the notion of quality means in

qualitative research *per se*). Further, the narrative aimed to demonstrate that the methods and the contested quality of the outcome of the research are congruent with the aims of the research. Despite endeavouring to address these challenges, there are practicalities and limitations that need to be recognised as part of the critical evaluation of this chapter.

Practicalities & Limitations

In any research, there seems to be an inevitability that it is incomplete or lacking in some way that leads the researcher and reader to conclude that a destination was not reached. This position is spelt out when reading many research papers. This thesis is no different. This section of this chapter however will limit itself to two particular areas; first, the limitations that the researcher encountered in the methodological stance adopted and second the practicalities and limitations in the method and the actual conducting of the research itself.

Research Methodology Limitations

One of the central tenets of social construction is the rejection of the ‘taken for granted’ perspective of the world. This perspective rejects assumptions made and urges questioning of the reality that one lives within. When located in a real life research situation, the ideology of social construction presents the researcher with challenges. How does the author reject the predisposition she/he brings to the interview encounter and within that predisposition the reality that he occupies? How can a ‘pure’ reality be constructed between the researcher and participant? Silverman (2001 p.97) contests that in part this is what he terms the ‘narrowness’ of social construction. He adds that interview data could be treated by the social constructionist as the only reality that exists and that the research focuses on the conversational skills of the participant rather than the actual content of what they may be saying. Could Silverman’s assertion about the ‘narrowness’ of social construction result in a possible shortcoming in this research? In attempting to understand this particular aspect of workplace bullying that has seemingly not been previously researched, this thesis is effectively an exploration to comprehend the landscape of third party intervention. It is contested therefore that to achieve this understanding, a qualitative approach offers the broader workplace bullying

agenda a significant original contribution and a platform from which future research may be pursued.

Practicality Limitations

The Acas helpline receives many calls every day. The environment in which the helpline advisors work could be characterised as busy and even frenetic at times. The quality of service being provided to employers and employees demands that calls may be answered in reasonable timescales. In order to meet these service quality standards, there must be sufficient people available to answer calls. This operational demand proved to be a significant factor in the interview and moreover the focus group schedules, as the latter requires a number of advisors to be released at the same time, thus exacerbating the reduction in advisors available to answer calls. Several visits had to be made to some office locations as the volume of calls and/or the availability of advisors prohibited interviews from taking place.

Summary

This chapter has explored both the methodology and method proposed by the researcher. It has been argued that to meet the aims of the thesis an empiricist approach would not be appropriate. This is because one of the central aims is to understand the role Acas plays when providing an intervention service into cases of workplace bullying. There is no hypothesis and there is no aim to provide evidence of relationships between variables as this would not explain the role Acas fulfils. In order to explain, it is argued that an understanding is essential. As this area of workplace bullying seems not to have been researched previously, an understanding of this small part of the workplace bullying landscape is fundamental in the first instance. It may be appropriate for those following this research to adopt a positivist approach to deduce certain aspects of third party intervention, but this would not have been a suitable approach for this research.

In order to conclude the most appropriate qualitative method, time was spent studying the real practicalities of accessing the organisation and those able to participate in this research. This led to the researcher being able to reject and

select what have been argued as appropriate and rigorous research methods. These methods have been assessed as ethical and are argued to be sufficiently comprehensive to understand the notion of third party intervention from a broad spectrum of actors within Acas. Those who have participated in the research have been interviewed and others have been part of focus groups. These two methods have been used to illustrate trends and themes that may emerge in the ensuing data. The following three chapters will now present and explain the results from the interviews and focus groups.

Chapter 7: How Staff at Acas Define Workplace Bullying

Chapter Introduction

The results from this research are presented over three chapters. Each chapter deals with results pertaining to a particular subject in connection with the aim of the thesis and provides a discussion section drawing on previous research and relevant contemporary bodies of literature. It is intended that this approach makes the results more digestible and better supports addressing the aim of the thesis.

This chapter examines the way that Acas helpline advisors define workplace bullying. This is an important first step in presenting the results. This is because in order for the researcher to address the aim of the thesis, it is critical to understand the way in which the participants and focus group participants define workplace bullying. As such this chapter provides a foundation on which the remainder of the results may be built and contributes to the ongoing definitional debate in the workplace bullying research agenda.

Introduction

This chapter introduces the fieldwork undertaken by the author. It will examine the data gathered in semi structured interviews and focus groups from staff at Acas who are involved in the provision of services to support people who call the helpline seeking advice for many workplace oriented issues. In this thesis however, boundaries have been established to restrict the enquiry into calls relating to workplace bullying. It has been established in previous chapters that there are apparent tensions over definitions of workplace bullying. The first part of this chapter will examine the way in which participants construct their understanding of the term 'workplace bullying' with the aim of establishing a base line or foundation for the author and reader to appreciate individual participant perspectives. This is important in order for the researcher and reader to contrast the academic discussion about the definitions of workplace bullying and critically contrast these with their own emotive situations they face in their daily working lives.

This part of the chapter aims to appreciate the situations in which the participants may encounter perceived instances of workplace bullying and attempts to understand how these encounters have shaped the way in which participants construct their reality of workplace bullying. It is important to examine critically these facets as this will contribute to ensuring the results and discussions contribute originality to the research debate and to avoid simply presenting a disaggregation of findings. The way in which advisors construct their meaning may affect the way in which they fulfil their role in providing an intervention solution for callers.

Presentation of Results

The presentation of the results has been distilled from interview and focus group transcripts. These results are the definitions that the participants in the research gave to workplace bullying. Within the presentation of the results, the researcher is identified as 'PW', and the participants by the pseudonym assigned to them to ensure their identity is protected. In order to provide perspective to the results, a brief cameo of each participant in the research is outlined in Table 7.1.

Pseudonym	Cameo portrait	Role
P1	Helpline advisor and manager. Female. Age 38. Employed by Acas for 7 years in the helpline and field mediation service.	Participant
P2	Helpline advisor. Female. Age 43. Employed by Acas for 11 years in helpline and employee support roles.	Participant & focus group
P3	Conciliator. Female. Age 44. Employed by Acas for 9 years in various conciliation roles.	Participant
P4	Helpline advisor. Male. Age 52. Employed by Acas for 15 years in various roles, the last 5 being in the helpline team.	Participant & focus group
P5	Helpline advisor and conciliator. Male. Age 32. Employed by Acas for 4 years in the helpline and latterly conciliation roles.	Participant
P6	Helpline advisor. Female. Age 37. Employed by Acas for 6 years in helpline advisor role.	Participant
P7	Helpline advisor. Female. Age 49. Employed by Acas for 3 years in helpline advisor role.	Participant
P8	Helpline advisor and team manager. Male. Age 42. Employed by Acas for 6 years in helpline and helpline manager roles.	Participant & focus group
P9	Helpline advisor. Male. Age 29. Employed by Acas for 3 years in helpline advisor role.	Participant
P10	Mediation officer. Female. Age 40. Employed by Acas for 9 years in mediation and conciliation roles.	Participant
P11	Helpline advisor. Male. Age 35. Employed by Acas for 5 years in helpline advisor role.	Participant
P12	Helpline advisor and conciliator. Female. Age 52. Employed by Acas for 15 years in various roles, including field based and telephone conciliation services.	Participant & focus group
P13	Helpline advisor and team manager. Female. Age 47. Employed by Acas for 6 years in helpline roles	Participant
P14	Mediation officer. Female. Age 44. Employed by Acas for 11 years in various diversity, equality, and mediation roles.	Participant
P15	Helpline manager. Female. Age 39. Employed by Acas for 9 years in various management roles, mainly with the helpline service.	Focus group participant
P16	Senior Manager. Male. Age 50. Employed by Acas for 9 years in various strategic roles, latterly responsible for a large UK region.	Participant
P17	Helpline advisor. Male. Age 32. Employed by Acas for 4 years in the helpline advisor role.	Focus group participant
P18	Helpline advisor. Male. Age 37. Employed by Acas for 2 years in the helpline advisor role.	Focus group participant
P19	Helpline advisor. Female. Age 41. Employed by Acas for 7 years in the helpline advisor role.	Focus group participant
P20	Helpline advisor. Female. Age 50. Employed by Acas for 10 years in various roles including helpline advisor.	Focus group participant
P21	Senior Manager employed in strategic policy	Participant

Table 7.1: Participant cameo portraits

Table 7.1 illustrates the wide range of ages and experiences of the participants in their employment with Acas and the relatively balanced gender mix. Additionally, some participants have purposely been selected who may not actually be employed as helpline advisors, although their role encompasses it, for example, mediation officers. This is argued to make a valuable contribution to the thesis as their role will impinge upon the helpline advisor service and the helpline advisors themselves as they work relatively closely together in terms of the function and service. Further, they are physically co-located or closely located with helpline advisors. It seems possible that the workplace social interaction will have some bearing on the way in which the role the helpline advisor plays and therefore their inclusion is considered important in addressing the aim of this thesis.

Two participants hold senior positions in the Acas organisation. They have been specifically selected as their responsibility includes the strategic management and direction setting of the helpline and the role it fulfils. This is considered by the researcher to be an important contribution as it may aid an explanation or understanding as to the role that the helpline advisor fulfils. Figure 7.1 illustrates the relevant parts of Acas and their interaction with those to whom they provide a service, highlighting the area upon which this thesis focuses.

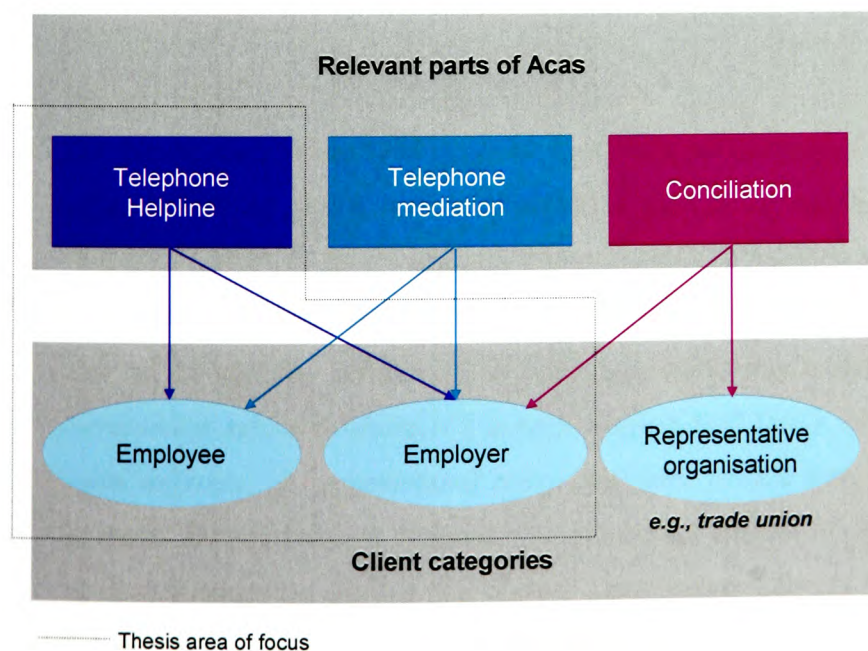


Figure 7.1: Typical Acas relationships with clients

The content provided in the cameo portraits has been carefully selected to ensure that it does not breach the conditions of confidentiality assured by the researcher. Other information such as location of work could have been provided, but has specifically been omitted. It is argued that the inclusion of this information would probably not benefit the thesis and is therefore not considered to have a negative bearing on the value of the research.

Results from Interviews and Focus Groups Regarding the Definition of Workplace Bullying.

This section of the results focuses on the way in which the respondents described how they would define workplace bullying. The objective of the narratives provided is to assist the reader in starting to appreciate and understand the way in which the participants construct workplace bullying.

The responses provided below were in reply to the following question which was worded exactly the same for each interview and focus group:

“In your work at Acas, if you have received calls from people who claim to have been bullied, what does workplace bullying mean to you?”

- P1 *“It depends how I am talking about workplace bullying, if it’s in our office or whether you’re talking to me about workplace bullying per se outside. Obviously as a manager, I’m conscious of bullying so I will treat it slightly differently in the office because I am more aware of it, but as an equality advisor, I’ve been out delivering bullying and harassment sessions where it’s a real problem and that’s something quite different. I see individual cases that some people have made a claim to the employment tribunal ... I will have a sample of cases and read them and I’ve noticed that there’s quite an increase on bullying, harassment and on ET claims, so it depends what you mean, where*

you're coming from as to how I answer"

PW *"So taking the term 'workplace bullying' in your job at Acas rather than as a line manager, how would you define it from your experiences there?"*

P1 *"Right, my job in Acas as an equality advisor. ... You often would go out or take calls and they think they've got one problem but when you actually start talking to them, you realise that there are some underlying issues about bullying. Not everybody is aware of the subtleties of bullying, you know, they're all very well aware of the fisticuffs bullying or the very obvious bullying, but sometimes when I run training courses and you start talking about you know, the side of bullying or the different types of bullying, you know, and sort of the subtleties of bullying and a lot of people don't understand that sometimes just exclusion can be, it doesn't necessarily have to be, but it could be a sign of bullying. But it's something I'm quite passionate about and so, as I say, in my work with Acas for about 18 months, that was my, one of the main strands of my work.*

It depends whether you're talking ... about bullying because we also tend to look at it from the discrimination angle, whether it's sex discrimination, race discrimination. I mean there is, I think there may be a definition that we use but, erm, I think it depends what I would, I'm sure if I had to sit down here and now and think about, I could but I would want to know why they need a definition, because bullying isn't just one sentence. This is what I think bullying is, that's only my perception of what bullying is and I just think that there are too many different connotations. If somebody said well this is what she has said bullying is in our training, and I haven't actually mentioned something, they'll say well it's not bullying because she said this or that. It's a dangerous place to go I would say.

Participant P1 makes an initial response as a line manager and not in her role as an Acas employee involved in cases of workplace bullying. This is an interesting response in that the participant's initial reply briefly reflected her responsibilities as a manager. It is also important to note that she comments that she would treat it slightly differently than in her role as an equality advisor. Is this because of the exposure she has to workplace bullying and has become sensitised or de-sensitised to the phenomenon? Is it because her role as an Acas advisor likely to mean she is more aware of prevailing workplace bullying matters? She comments that in her work she experiences situations that are quite different, possibly implying that the degrees of workplace bullying are significant and form part of what could be defined as a continuum. Possibly of most relevance to the bullying debate is her comment around how bullying is defined rather than what it is defined as. She notes that trying to define bullying is high risk as the definition offered, in this case during a training session, may not contain details that are relevant to a potential bullying episode. She appears to be maintaining that definitions could jeopardise cases being resolved. It is apparent that P3 also wishes to detach herself from committing to a definition and exposes a degree of possible confusion.

P3 *Err, I think with anything like this, be it discrimination, bullying and harassment, my view is that if an individual feels that they have been, then you can't ever take away that feeling from them. Erm, but I am not sure that I could say that that was and that wasn't bullying because to say that to an individual could ... I am not really expressing myself very well here. But what I might feel is bullying and harassment, you might not. And I think that is where it becomes difficult to define. Erm... does that help at all?*

PW *"You mentioned bullying, harassment and discrimination. Do you think that they are the same?*

P3 *Erm, I think bullying is somebody that is probably sometimes quite aggressive in their approach to an individual whereas I see harassment, somebody can be the nicest person on earth, but they can drive you nuts*

because they are always on your back “have you done that? Have you done this? Have you done that? Have you done the other?” And that for me is the difference, but bullying doesn't have to be violent does it? Erm, neither does harassment, so maybe there are similarities.

It may be seen here that participant P3 is an experienced member of staff in conciliation, mediation, and helpline roles. Despite 9 years of experience, and an apparent willingness to share her opinions and knowledge, she appears unable to compose sentences that explain and address the question posed by the researcher. Her use of the term harassment and discrimination suggest that she defines workplace bullying possibly as a sub set of other phenomena or maybe an intrinsic part of them. Again, similar to other participants, it is noticeable that she emphasises that the experience of the individual as being a central tenet of the definition. The notion of the individual's experience being an important part of the definition is also at the heart of race discrimination. It seems possible that the helpline is likely to deal with discrimination enquiries and that this may influence an advisor's opinion over definitions of such phenomena as workplace bullying. Is her experience actually disadvantaging her in being able to address the question posed by the researcher? Is it possibly the case that her experiences within the discourses of workplace bullying have resulted in a situation whereby she has encountered so many incidents that could be workplace bullying, that she is unable to unravel these occurrences in a way that can make sense to her and her audience? The ability to succinctly answer the question appears to be a trend as is apparent from the following response from P4.

P4 *“Workplace bullying is what I hear over the phone, somebody who will ring me up and say, “I feel I'm being bullied.” ... It's when somebody, an employee, perceives that they're being bullied. You might not actually think from what they've told you that they are being bullied, but if they think they are and they've been intimidated because if it, then to me that is somebody being bullied. It's not how the person who's doing the bullying feels even, it's the person who's being bullied, or perceives they're being bullied and how they feel. That's workplace bullying. It comes in all stages but different levels but if somebody feels*

they're being bullied then it has to be taken as... well it should be taken seriously".

"I wouldn't form an opinion as to whether it's bullying, ... you've only got to listen to somebody and they're very distressed so obviously whether they are or not they think they're being bullied so you work from there and tell them what their options are but to be perfectly honest they're a bit limited".

"You know if they've gone to... if they've already gone to their supervisor or if it's... it's a state where their supervisor is actually doing the bullying it's hard people who are in that position usually feel threatened anyway and they don't want you telling them, "You need to make this formal. You need to put it in writing. You need to go to your manager ... "But these are the people that are bullying me and I'm frightened." It's difficult. It's hard to make a connection for them but you can ... you get an inkling from ... from their tone and their manner on the phone. You get some people who come on and possibly are just trying to be vindictive; "I think I'm being bullied I want to do something about it," but you can ... I mean I'm saying you can usually tell. Who knows because I don't know who's on the other end of the phone so I don't know but all I can do is give them the advice that we have available to give to them.

"I'd say that it's very difficult to define which is why there's no jurisdiction for it as a stand alone (said laughingly by the participant) at the employment tribunals because it comes back to the employee perceiving they've been bullied, and that's too difficult to deal with. So the management should have some sort of procedures in place with bullying and harassment policy as to how they deal with claims of bullying. They need to be investigated. So it's... it's difficult. It's not an easy... it's a really difficult thing to quantify. I don't think you can really."

It appears that a theme is emerging within the responses offered by participants in attempting to define workplace bullying. Participant P4 initially does not attempt to define workplace bullying. He focuses on the way that he interprets and accepts the reality of caller and appears to make some reference to the legal frameworks in the UK as possibly lacking in some way to deal with workplace bullying because it is difficult to define. Later however, it is apparent that the participant brings his own views and opinions into the discussion, explaining how he may interpret the conversation and how he can empathise with the situation the target of the bullying may be experiencing. Forming a definition from personal experience is also apparent in P5's response.

P5 ... *It could mean a wide variety of different things. I guess there's still the old fashioned physical abuse, there's violent outbursts towards people. Of course an awful lot of it can be combined with discrimination. More common now, I think as people begin to understand, I guess the more subtle bullying person who constantly interrupts and prevents you from speaking, the ostracising of individuals, which in itself, you know, has almost become unacceptable ... there is a workplace bullying category of its own now which is outside ... the old fashioned terms, you know, physical and violent behaviour ... Defining workplace bullying is more about me than the person ringing in. I don't think they want me to define anything for them, but ... it's useful if I have an opinion ... a definition for me.*

The response from participant P5 reveals two important points. First, a definition is something that is useful for him, but only as a point of personal reference and not something that he may share with a caller. It seems he may use his definition as a framework, although the explanation he offers of his definition is possibly of little use.

Second, he implies what may be a more time based definition. At aged 32, it is possible that he has experienced what he terms 'old fashioned abuse' in some way, which appears to prompt him to make a comparison with contemporary

workplaces concatenating the phenomenon in a form of a chronology. Is the individualised experience of the workplace that leads P5 to respond in this way? The notion that time and experience helps shape a complex opinion is expressed by P6.

P6 *Well usually, we get calls from employees, normally, and they're usually just stressed or upset and they can say, "Well I've experienced bullying," and we just ask them to explain what's happened. So that's the first thing we do and listen to their story and just need to see who we can signpost them to. I think that's the more common one, it's from management, that's what I find with it. So then we ask them about a grievance procedure to make sure they follow the procedure correctly and if they feel forced out of their employment sometimes they ring us and they're already on the sick anyway and they feel forced out and we'll try and say, "Well look if you can try and resolve it internally first of all, go back to your manager or someone senior first, your manager, and not just a grievance," and so for us at Acas we try and show them the correct procedure to follow so if then the next step would be an employment tribunal to say they feel constructively dismissed and they feel that they've gone through the correct procedure. So first of all we will always try and see if they can resolve it internally first of all.*

P6 offers a reply which is unique in the participants' overall responses. This is because she does not attempt to address the question asked. Instead, it appears that she explains the process she may adopt when speaking to a caller regarding workplace bullying. In the context of this thesis and its main aim of what role does the Acas helpline fulfil in intervening in cases of workplace bullying, this answer may be very appropriate. Is this the role played by the Acas helpline advisor? The process based, objective answer she offered did not attempt to provide the researcher any insight as to her opinion or viewpoint. Acas helpline advisors are trained to remain impartial and not to offer opinions. This organisational characteristic is a noticeable and overt part of the culture. It was observed in conversations between the researcher and participants during informal

discussions as well as during interviews. It is argued by the researcher to be of significant importance. This is because Acas prides itself and indeed promotes itself on its approach to complete impartiality. Is it feasible to expect someone calling Acas in cases of perceived workplace bullying to be able to receive a response that does not infer any implicit support? It seems probable that people may be calling specifically to seek some empathetic support. If this search is met with objective, impartial fact based information, is it likely to help provide an effective intervention? This thesis cannot attempt to address this question as it falls outside the boundaries of the aim of the research. There may well be future opportunity however for research to examine what form of dyadic intervention may be most appropriate in cases of workplace bullying.

Do Acas' values, rules, processes, and culture extend so far as to prevent individuals from forming opinions? Does P6's reply offer some signpost to help address the aim of understanding this research? The impartiality of the Acas advisor is apparent in P5 and P7's comments where they almost dismiss the notion of defining workplace bullying. Is this possibly because even if she did, she would be unable to represent that definition to a caller thus effectively rendering it an unusable piece of information?

P7 *"Well, it's different for everybody. I mean, some people's idea of bullying is, erm, somebody shouting at them, others might be that they're intruding in their work too often, it's really how the person perceives it. I mean, what one person can take from somebody which might be just in fun, another person would perhaps perceive to be bullying.*

I don't think it's that easy to define because each individual will have their own views on whether, what they're, erm, the behaviour that they're tolerating, whether they perceive that to be bullying. I don't see any point in trying to define it because if you have been bullied and you're feeling bad, you are hardly likely to listen to a definition are you?"

P5 ... *As an advisor I probably need to know what it is, but there's not much point in me telling them that. Cos' if I did, that would be seen as bias as I would be telling them what was happening to them and that's not allowed.*

The recurring theme of personal perception is again evident in the response from participants P5 and P7. It is interesting to note that participant P7 takes the argument about definition a stage further, suggesting that there is no value in defining workplace bullying, thereby inferring that the phenomenon is wholly predicated on personal perception. Participant P5 perceives a value in a definition, but only from a personal perspective and not to share with a caller, because she alleges that it is not allowed.

Participant P7 suggests that if a person is being bullied then the definition of bullying is what that person is experiencing and that a definition would not be useful in that situation. This raises two interesting points. First, the arguments over definitions may not be worth pursuing with those who are currently being bullied as their mindset may be deeply entrenched in their own personal situation. It also seems possible that by attempting to prescribe a definition, which at best appears to be somewhat vague, may exacerbate their distress. Further, reciting a definition may appear to be judgemental, which is contrary to Acas' core values and thus could be counter-productive on more than one front. Despite the importance of the current academic definitional debate, could attempting to define workplace bullying in the operational world of the Acas advisor, be a futile exercise that actually destroys some of the value of the service they offer?

Second, the sooner the bullying can be identified and addressed by the organisation's policies and processes then arguably the greater chance that the target of the bullying will be able to respond in an objective manner. The suggestion that one's personal situation is relevant is pursued by P8. He suggests that notwithstanding the potential lack of value in a definition, as people define the way they are treated differently, then the definition may have limited use.

P8 *It's difficult because it's obviously dependent on what they're actually*

saying to you. It's very hard to define what bullying might well be because it will vary from person to person and obviously we're seeing it from, I'm trying to give a balanced view of this and what it is. Someone might be making a complaint thinking they're being bullied, depending on what they're saying it might be firm management, so you need to perhaps go round all the areas and sort of explain what bullying could be seen as. Then it's for them to decide and think whether they'd construe it as bullying or not, but there are some calls we get which it's so obvious they're being bullied, some calls which some just say it's firm management, so it's difficult to sort of say one way or another.

I don't try and get a mental picture too much 'cause it would tend to colour what I might say, although it shouldn't do, it doesn't do, but I mean the problem is you try and side perhaps slightly without realising you're doing it just because it's a difficult thing to remain impartial about. I don't like to hear people being treated unfairly and maybe it's just that in me that wants to help them get back to a better position, erm, but of course we can't take sides."

The response from participant P8 appears to contradict itself. The reply suggests that workplace bullying is individualised from the target's perspective. However, his response develops to suggest that the advisor may need to explain what bullying is. Finally, he adds that if he does not construct a 'mental picture' of the case he is dealing with in an attempt to remain impartial.

It seems feasible that this advisor struggles with defining bullying himself, explaining the phenomenon to those who may be in contact with him regarding workplace bullying, whilst attempting to remain detached and objective in his work. Is this a realistic situation that other advisors may encounter? The reality that the advisor may have constructed regarding workplace bullying is likely to have been built on a number of influential episodes and discourses, for example, their training, previous calls received and social discussion with other advisors and colleagues.

It appears probable that these experiences will be at least part of the construction the advisor forms as to what workplace bullying is. When listening to future calls, how does the reality they have constructed influence the contact they have with the caller? How does the current interaction then compound the advisor's existing knowledge and experience? Is it feasible that this cycle can continually and dynamically occur and that throughout, the advisor remains wholly objective without forming opinions that may affect the advice they offer? This would appear to be an unrealistic outcome, especially when as P8 stated, from a personal perspective, he does not like to see people being treated unfairly. Can such a personal value be withheld from interactions with people with whom he comes into contact? Whilst this thesis cannot answer this question, it is important to acknowledge that the response offered a direct insight into the advisor's opinion as well as the 'work mask' that he may wear, indicating that possibly such openness may be unavoidable in the roles played. The way in which personal opinions are built in helping advisors to define workplace bullying is discussed by P9.

PW *"In your work at Acas, if you have received calls from people who claim to have been bullied, what does workplace bullying mean to you?"*

P9 *"It's where, um, one individual feels that the behaviour of one or more of their colleagues or ... management ... makes them feel uncomfortable or under pressure. Erm, just really from hearing people calling and really telling their stories".*

Participant P9's response introduces a new facet to the way in which the participants replied to the question regarding definition. The response is succinct and despite encouragement from the author to elaborate on the initial response, the participant declined to add further content. The story telling interpretation that characterises P9's reply is possibly the key point of interest. Story telling may provide an insight into how definitions may be formulated by advisors in their many contacts with people. Is story telling an appropriate way to aid the

definition of workplace bullying? Each Acas advisor takes approximately 30 calls per shift worked. This equates to approximately 150 calls per working week, or 6000 calls per year per advisor. These contacts are probably dyadic discussions that necessitate explanations by the caller to contextualise the content for the advisor. In doing this, it is argued that the explanation may well take the form of a story that is embellished to accommodate the caller's perspective and to elicit the information they may well be seeking. Can an Acas advisor really reject the context presented and distil from the conversation succinct statements that objectively describe the situation? The author argues the context in the discourse existing between caller and advisor helps the advisor to fulfil their role to the best of their ability. This may be one of the key roles helpline advisors fulfil; their ability to disseminate casual discussion with the caller from the key points in the conversation that may enable them to provide a valuable intervention service.

The notion that any discourse that exists in such phenomena as workplace bullying can be bereft of bias, subjectivity, emotion, and context unique to the specific situation is argued by the author to be unrealistic and somewhat absurd. The account presented by the caller is inevitably loaded with preconceptions shaped by his or her experience. This argument may be applied in many situations in the social world where an opinion over an event is being relayed. Does this argument have potential ramifications for other agencies acting in cases of workplace bullying or indeed any other emotion based service? It is argued by the researcher that by processing the embellishing content of the story, the recipient of the information will be able to better formulate a response that is appropriate to the situation. This is not to suggest that the advisor, or other agency, needs to agree or support the overall comment made by the caller. Rather, it appears materially important to acknowledge and rationally synthesize the information provided. Indeed, this approach may even provide a vehicle for the advisor to become a more skilled employee. Such a synthesis of information by the advisor may help Acas' organisational performance and the caller receive a response that may be useful. This is more efficiently inferred by P10.

P10 *"I've received loads of calls from people who claim to have been bullied. Not convinced they have all been erm, well, they may have*

been as far as they are concerned, but there's been times when its then come out in the conversation that they want to leave or something and they are looking for something to have on their boss, you know, like accuse them of something.

I couldn't tell you how I would define bullying, have never thought about it really, it's up to them anyway. If they think they've been bullied, I'm not going to tell them they haven't, because I wouldn't know, even if they did explain it to me. The calls usually take ages, so I suppose that must mean it's a difficult thing to deal with. My calls are usually less than six minutes, but I have some on for ages about bullying and harassment."

PW *"You used the word harassment with the word bullying. Do you think they are the same?"*

P10 *"Really couldn't tell you. The tribunal would have to work that out if it came to it. Erm, the person being bullied probably doesn't give a damn what you call it though." I think you can be bullied and harassed at the same time and harassment, may erm, well probably isn't always bullying as it's that continuing hassle. Though, probably if someone's hassling you, you may see that as bullying. I wouldn't think that someone who was hassling you could bully you unless they had the means to overpower you. I mean, if you don't like getting hassled, then you can do something about that, but if someone's bullying you, that's different because you have less power to act against them. That's my experience anyway.*

Participant P10 provides a valuable insight into the way P10 may construct an interpretation of workplace bullying. P10 refers to bullying in the first part of her response as a means of eliciting an outcome by claiming bullying has or is taking place. There appears to be a scepticism or even cynicism about the way in which she relates bullying in the reply offered. She also refuses to define bullying, similar to participant P7 above. The reason for declining to define the

phenomenon appears to be different. P10 apparently sees no value because despite her best endeavours, she insinuates that she would not be able to determine if bullying had taken place or not. She adds that bullying calls usually take a long time, because they are 'difficult'. It is interesting to consider whether the calls take a long time for this reason or because of the relationship that may ensue. Whilst there may be other reasons that these calls take a long time, it is notable that the advisor perceives bullying calls take a long time because they are difficult calls.

The advisor also uses the term harassment and does not see a distinction between this and bullying. Again, it appears that she feigns disinterest suggesting that the similarity or difference in definition would be the responsibility of others. Whether this is actually disinterest or simply her style of response is debateable.

Finally, P10 recognises the notion of power as being material in workplace bullying, suggesting that people may be bullied because they do not have the power to act against the perpetrators.

P14 *Erm, that's interesting, isn't it, because I've worked with it such a lot. What immediately come into mind are all the definitions coming from all over the place, but I suppose talking to lots of people who have been bullied or ... I think it's a continuum. I think that there are people who ... feel they're being treated unfairly who then colloquially call it bullying, erm, but there is always that under, there's always some underlying thing, there's always some feeling of being not treated fairly in respect to others or in respect to what's going on in their situation. That's sort of one end of a continuum if you like ... through to people being, erm, undermined, erm, being, erm, abused emotionally or psychologically or physically in some way, erm, having their self-esteem and self-confidence destroyed.*

I think that's quite crucial because ... there are some behaviours which will be regarded as bullying ... but some people cope with it, manage it,

bat it back, deal with it and it doesn't affect them emotionally or psychologically and there's other, in some circumstances ... it can get to people. I think once it starts getting to the person, once it starts affecting their image, their self-esteem and their self-confidence and their judgement and decision-making, then that's when I would say that somebody is being bullied. Whatever label you might want to put upon it, they're not being treated in a fair way, when it undermines their self-confidence.

The response from participant P14 may be considered the most detailed in the data. She appears to have a well developed opinion about workplace bullying and relative to others participants, and has been able to craft a more detailed reply to the researcher's question. In the first part of her response, she hints that story telling has played a part in the way she has come to define workplace bullying. Further, she adds that there are definitions '*coming from all over the place*'. The interview transcript shows that this refers to company policies, Acas documentation, Government papers, and legal case precedent. This could be interpreted that the experiences to which she has been exposed, coupled with the stories that she has heard from various people in bullying stories have helped shape what she now regards as the way she can define workplace bullying.

She infers that bullying is a continuum. She refers to what she considers minor and major cases of behaviours and treatments that could be considered workplace bullying. However, she then is clear in saying that bullying is evident when the person subjected to the treatment is affected. This is an interesting perspective because whilst she recognises the degrees to which bullying may occur, she equally places the definition in the gift of the person being bullied. How can Acas adapt to this duality where bullying is a phenomenon, when observed, which is variable in terms of severity yet is defined from the person set within it? This situation may illustrate a paradox that is intricate; the advisor is likely to be attempting to provide a solution or advice to someone who 'knows' they are being treated unjustly, but may not be able to explain why. The advisor equally cannot define the treatment the caller is being subjected to, but may be able to understand the dilemma and based on a high level of interpretation and subjectivity needs to

decide on the best course of action. Does such a level of ambiguity provide a signpost that could demonstrate the difficulties faced by Acas' advisors such as that explored with P15 below?

P15 *"What does it [bullying] mean to me? Gosh, well, I don't know, erm, you've got the obvious where there's aggression ... I suppose sort of arguments could come off it, or it could be more subtle, it could be the way people just treat other people, it could be peers, it could be a management thing picking on individuals, any number of things, it's quite wide. That's a really difficult question. I have never spoken to someone who has asked for it to be defined. They seem to be able to use the word bullying and talk about being bullied without asking what it means or how it's defined ... erm, you know like disability.*

I don't think there is a need to define it is there because if you feel someone is treating you badly, then a definition is not going to make you change your mind. It may mean that you can't do that much about it, but you'll still feel, erm, well bad about whatever happened."

The response from P15 reverts to replies similar to those above. It is apparent that despite 9 years service and management responsibility, she uses language that suggests she finds answering the question relatively difficult; the structure of the first part of her response lacks the structure of a sentence that may be reasonably expected and she concludes explicitly noting that the researcher's question is difficult to answer.

It is notable that she contrasts the difficulty of defining bullying with disability. Disability may be considered a workplace phenomenon with a higher profile, with legal protection via the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), and as such may be considered simpler to define. Do Acas' callers benefit more when discussing clearer issues such as disability or age related matters? Is the lack of definition in legal terms hindering the Acas advisor in supporting callers? P14 implies that people simply use the word without recourse to a commonly held definition. This

may mean that Acas advisors and callers could inadvertently subtly conflict with each other if differing interpretations of the term are used in the interaction.

Finally, P15 notes that a definition may be of little use. This is an important comment that resonates with the philosophy of social construction. This is because she is clear in asserting that the way in which you may feel because of bullying, (your construction of reality) is unlikely to be changed by a definition that is probably alien to your current situation. The benefit of a definition for a phenomenon that appears to be very subjective is of little benefit to a target of bullying especially when there may be no recourse towards the perpetrator. P15's response suggests that she feels that sometimes nothing can be done about bullying therefore questioning the need for a definition. Can nothing be done because the advisor cannot relate to a definition even though Acas do have one of their own? Can a definition adequately address the myriad experiences that people may associate with bullying? It appears that to address these questions in the context that P14 offers, it is necessary to relate the definition in a way that is 'subject centric', that is, that a definition could be expressed from the subject's perspective. The subject has two meanings in this context. First, the subject or target of the bullying and second the subject or name of the issue being faced by the caller. P16 below relates workplace bullying to other subjects that may, in specific circumstances, have a relation to workplace bullying, although in terms of defining it, this could not be generalised.

P16 *Right, well its not only from my current role but also from my previous role ... One of my previous jobs was as a race relations advisor ... and although it was focused on race it covered the range of equality stuff so we had a lot of contact with, with bullying issues for a number of reasons. You see, in my experience they are all linked, not always, but often. I would take a very wide definition of it and say that its any situation in the workplace I would believe where ... somebody feels either threatened or offended by somebody else's behaviour. Erm, whether it's you know erm verbal things said, whether there's physical bullying. Or, erm, neither of those directly, it could be other things where people feel ostracised. I used to work all over with police*

forces and all sorts of things went on there. Erm I'll give you one example. A new woman police sergeant went to a police station and during the first week, she picked her hat up and found that someone had drawn willies inside all round the rim and things like that. I would class that as bullying as well and she certainly felt very ... upset by that. I take a wide definition of it and ... from my sort of equality background as well, I tend to see it in situations where there's some sort of power imbalance. Not necessarily the hierarchical imbalance because I've seen bullying where you know somebody way up the hierarchy can be bullied by one or all people below in it. I wouldn't seek to sort of confine my definition to any particular reason for the bullying or you know, whether it's ... with racial intent, general intent or religious intent or anything else. So I tend to I think draw quite a wide definition.

P16's response possibly reveals the many years of experience he has in dealing with people in situations where social injustice is either commonplace or central to his role. It is apparent that these years of experience have resulted in what is a broad descriptive response to the researchers' question. Has the breadth as well as depth of familiarity regarding phenomena such as workplace bullying encountered by P16 provided him with a more complete suite of experiences on which to construct a reply to the researcher's question? This may be the case as he has drawn on a wide range of experiences in numerous fields, for example, his experience in race relations and equality work.

Drawing on specific examples outside the race and equality paradigms, P16 illustrates a situation that he constructs as a form of bullying based on what may be deemed sexual harassment. Whilst he does not relate the instance he discusses to sexual harassment, it may resonate more with that construct than bullying. Based on P16's comments, would it be helpful to associate a definition of workplace bullying to such constructs as equality, race, and sexual harassment? Maybe a more fundamental question to consider is whether workplace bullying is some form of these and other constructs and possibly does not warrant a definition at all?

P16 with similarities to P10 recognises power imbalance as a component in the definition offered for workplace bullying, noting that power does not necessarily equate to formalised organisational status suggesting that the power may be held by junior members of the organisation and used to bully others superior in organisational terms.

A review of the focus group's discussion around definitions does not provide a more concrete response characterised with consensus or content.

P15 *"I'll start it off by saying that workplace bullying to me is not how it's perceived; it's how the person who's being bullied feels. It might not necessarily, in somebody else's eyes, be regarded as bullying but if they feel like their being bullied then something needs to be done about it and that's workplace bullying to me."*

P20 *"I've never heard of one and I wouldn't want to try and explain it. Definitions are hard enough for things like holiday entitlement let alone bullying."*

P17 *"I think workplace bullying is becoming a tag for a certain type bullying all of its own ... You know the subtle stuff, when, err, they know they're doing it, but it's difficult to pin it on them. I wouldn't take sides though, that's not my place to do".*

P19 *"I think it can be as simple as over familiar behaviour not necessarily through bad words or ... I guess ... you've got to be really careful these days."*

P17 *"The overt ... and the subtle pressure I think is from senior management who genuinely might not think that they are being ... that they're acting in that way. They might not realise that it's being perceived as bullying ... they just want the bottom dollar; they want a good day's work for a good day's money ... so it's how people*

perceive it and share their views.

Participants P2, P11, P12, and P13 were in a focus group where definition was discussed. The focus group participants who are cited here show consistent themes with the participants. It is important to note that despite different social environments, the discussions around definition were broadly the same. There were no major differences in the participants' views, although it was apparent that the participants were more cautious in the focus group setting. This was apparent because of the continued prompts and encouragement from the researcher for the participants to speak, which had to be carefully worded so as to ensure that they were not influenced in any way to pursue a particular line of discussion.

It is apparent from the transcripts that there was consensus that a definition would be individualistic in nature; that is, a definition for workplace bullying would ultimately be interpreted by the target of the bullying episode. The difficulty in being able to coin a definition was also apparent, which is a theme that has also been evident in the interview results in this chapter. It is apparent that whilst P13 appeared to wish to make a comment, she found some difficulty in being able to represent her views. This would appear to be contrary to what may be expected. She is an experienced employee with management responsibilities. Could there be reasons why she was unable to articulate a response that may be considered commensurate with what would be expected with her position and experience? Her response may have been affected by the group setting or dynamic. Whilst this cannot be established empirically, there are other points in this focus group conversation regarding the definition of workplace bullying.

Two important points are raised in the focus group discussion. First, there are signs that the participants are being cautious in their comments. For example, they appear to be emphasising that caution is required in making any comments, such as, "You have to be really careful these days", and "... it's not my place to do" when commenting on so called 'taking sides'. Second, such comments as those relating to managers' behaviour being robust rather than bullying imply that the participants are trying to take a balanced view that is empathetic to both sides

of the debate, that is, in the context of this conversation to infer that the manager is the bully and the employee the target. These points were not evident in individual interviews. Was this because people in a group setting are likely to be more conscious of others' opinions? This area will be discussed later in the chapter, however it is important to note that there are prominent additions in the definition discussion that become apparent when a group discusses the subject of defining workplace bullying.

Discussion

Having presented the results from the interviews and focus group regarding definitions for workplace bullying, attention is now turned to a critical discussion drawing upon the existing workplace bullying literature and the associated range of literatures that have been presented previously. The critique that follows is immediately presented with a challenge in that the majority of results and commentary about definitions for workplace bullying are found in post-positivistic research. Comparisons between post-positivist empirically based research and interpretive qualitative studies such as this thesis appear to be inherently impractical. This is due to the difference in the fundamental philosophical foundations on which the research is based, the methodology and fundamental aim of the thesis, which the author argues makes comparisons limited in use. Therefore, it should be noted that the approach taken in the critical commentary is predicated upon contrasting research approaches in many instances.

Whilst this may be considered an obstacle in the ensuing discussion, it is argued that the intrinsic complexities of the workplace bullying debate may necessitate researchers to address these epistemological obstacles in their endeavours to better comprehend and communicate this phenomenon. It is important to recognise at this juncture that the subsequent discussion contributes to the existing debate. There is no assertion by the author that the results contained here hold any more credence or value than the many other results that have been previously presented; rather advocating the importance to different research approaches enriches the debate and understanding of the phenomenon.

Saunders' (2007) paper is particularly relevant to utilise in this discussion. First, it is relatively new research. Second, its central aim is to explore definitions of workplace bullying. Saunders (2007) states essential and non-essential defining criteria, drawing upon many definitions and variations of definitions that have been cited in previous research. The aim of her research was to establish if lay persons' definitions of workplace bullying coincided with the scientific definitions made in academic literature. The results provide some resonance with the results in this thesis. The participants in Saunders' work were asked to provide a written definition for bullying whilst in a formalised time constrained environment. There are numerous occurrences where the responses cited that bullying was difficult to define, was measured by the recipient of the bullying, and that the bullying would vary from person to person depending on how they felt about the situation they were experiencing. Saunders concludes that more consideration should be given to the definitions employees offer, which is a theme consistent with Liefvooghe (2001).

From the results in this research, it is apparent that Acas employees would appear to form their own definitions of the subject, in part through the experiences of their interactions with callers about workplace bullying. Does this help Acas provide a service commensurate with their callers' requirements? In order to address this question, it may be useful to contrast the developments made in defining workplace bullying with the results presented in this thesis. This assessment may help in determining if a convergence of definitions is perceptible and that could support the assertions offered by Saunders (2007).

During the 1990s, definitions for workplace bullying were spawned by many researchers involved in workplace bullying, (for example, Liefvooghe and Olafsson, 1999, Rayner, 1999, Einarsen, 1998, Leymann, 1996, Robinson and Bennett 1995, and Ashforth, 1994), although there appeared to be a lack of general agreement of a standardised definition of bullying, (Rayner, 1999). The style and content of the definitions crafted by these researchers were largely positivistic in their structure and were based on almost exclusively quantitative research methods. Many descriptions, related to workplace bullying, emerged across an international research debate such as 'mobbing', (Leymann and

Gustafsson, 1996) and 'petty tyranny', (Ashforth, 1994) which were accompanied by constructs that operationally defined the phenomenon to which they were referring. The operational definitions that have become generally accepted appear to constrict the meaning of workplace bullying. For example, Einarsen et al (2003) reveal the same definition in three chapters, which seems to have its origins in research conducted in 1996 by Einarsen himself. The results of this thesis do not support the majority of the definitions that appear in the workplace bullying literature. The definitions promulgated by academics during the 1990s cite specific conditions which appear to be prerequisite parameters in scientific circumstances which must be satisfied for workplace bullying to have taken place. This is contrary to the findings of this research where it is evident that none of the respondents cited any specific conditions that had to be met for workplace bullying to be determined as the problem that was being discussed between caller and advisor, or indeed conciliator and mediator. This assertion is not intended to dismiss the earlier research that pioneered the research landscape for workplace bullying. Rather, it appears that it is necessary for the definitional dilemma to mature where other constituents in the workplace bullying discourses may be represented.

Since 2000, commentators appear to have continued to wrestle with agreeing an operational definition for workplace bullying, (for example, Tehrani, 2004 and Lewis, 2004, Coyne et al, 2003, and Cowie et al, 2002,). An empiricist majority has continued to dominate the research debate, (for example, Salin, 2001, Hoel et al, 2004, Notelaars et al, 2006 and Moayed et al 2006). Whilst these published research papers all undoubtedly contribute excellent material to the debate, are they advocating definitions that if stated for long enough will become accepted mantras? Hoel and Beale (2006) in discussing the established approaches to workplace bullying claim that some commentators are criticizing the current state of the definitional debate for having too much subjectivity and 'leaving too much room for subjective interpretation'. This is a view supported by Saunders et al (2007) who claim a uniform definition would be beneficial for a number of reasons, one of which being to formulate strategies to counteract bullying in the workplace. Is it reasonable to suggest that by adopting a uniform definition that this would help eradicate workplace bullying? It would appear that this is a rather

ambitious aspiration. However, drawing on another reason cited by Saunders et al (2007), and supported by Meglich-Sespico et al (2007) there is an argument in favour of a uniform definition that would enhance the legal position relating to workplace bullying, thereby facilitating a stronger position for targets of workplace bullying to redress their suitors. Is the academic community trying to reach a utopian ideal in defining workplace bullying? This researcher argues that the complex construct of workplace bullying, which in part is illustrated in these results, suggests that attempts to constrict the phenomenon within boundaries set by academics or lawyers may result in unjust outcomes for those who may be unfortunate enough to be the recipients of bullying behaviours. Does this mean that any behaviour or treatment received can therefore be treated as bullying if the person experiencing it perceives it as such? This could be equally unjust for those people in organisations who are only endeavouring to lead a high performing organisation through what may be determined by some as bullying. It seems that the definitional debate should continue to further both the academic and practitioner communities' understanding of the phenomenon in order to be able to appropriately address it.

The results presented in this thesis are argued by the author to illustrate that subjective interpretation is precisely what is required to better contextualise and understand the workplace bullying phenomenon if progress is to be made in understanding what a definition could be in the future. Does the overall lack of succinct explanation and objective description mean that results such as those found in this research are to be discounted from the evolving workplace bullying debate? There is increasing evidence in recent research to suggest interpretive research results may be gaining some respect. For example, Hoel and Beale (2006) discuss the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach and recognise the work of Lewis and Rayner, (2003), Liefhoghe, (2001), Liefhoghe and MacKenzie-Davey, (2003). Hoel and Beale (2006) add that the approaches by these researchers are insufficiently contextualised. Whilst it is not entirely clear what they mean by this comment, it is argued here that context in the workplace bullying debate is not something that can be generalised. The results of this research infer that the context of each possible workplace bullying call made to the Acas helpline will be a unique set of circumstances. The context can therefore

only be generalised at a superficial level. An unwillingness to accept this suggests that researchers want or maybe need to attribute specific characteristics and context to accommodate definitions and situational circumstances that assist in supporting previous research. If the workplace bullying debate is to flourish and not find itself subsumed within another established phenomenon, then researchers and practitioners alike must accept that compartmentalisation of what it is, or is not, may possibly remain a futile exercise. Instead, it may be beneficial to celebrate the diversity of the subject and accept a set of fluid boundaries within which the understanding of the phenomenon may grow and be better understood.

There are exceptions to the post-positivist debate that permeate the workplace bullying research agenda. For example, Liefhoghe and Olafsson (1999) discuss the amateur perspective where actors in the social world hold 'common sense theories about all aspects of life and society', (p.41). Liefhoghe and Olafsson, (1998) also notes an important point that is relevant to the various research survey instruments that had been used in the 1990s, (for example, Einarsen and Raknes, 1997) and indeed to date. He states that bullying is often artificially introduced into the conversation, suggesting participants in his research responded saying 'you could refer to it as that'. Lewis, (2004) suggests that the complex schema of subjectivity and perception characterised in a workplace bullying episode means that it may be impossible to gain agreement or present a common and unified approach to defining workplace bullying. Lewis's assertion has some resonance with the results presented in this thesis. The only consistent evidence appears to be that workplace bullying is what the target perceives it to be.

Liefhoghe (2003) maintains that the construct of bullying may not be understood by adults in the context of their own working life, hence actors' possible acceptance of 'workplace bullying' as a term that describes or represents an experience, rather than a given sub conscious recognition that they both readily comprehend and accept as a social norm. This is potentially a significant observation that has bearing on the results of this thesis and may explain why the author asserts that the conventional and more widely accepted definitions may be of limited use in the context of the Acas helpline advisor attempting to support a target of workplace bullying behaviours. Who is benefiting by defining

workplace bullying in the way that the research debate generally has done to date? The results of this chapter suggest that workplace bullying is an experience which is unique to the person experiencing it. The findings also suggest that the person calling the Acas helpline may not identify their experience as workplace bullying. The reasons for the persons calling Acas is not identified in this thesis, although it is reasonable to conclude that their personal experience leads them to believe that they have a valid reason for claiming their treatment in the workplace is unjust or unfair in some way. It is argued by the author that any definition offered should be of some use to practitioners such as Acas helpline advisors. Are the definitions promulgated by researchers falling short of this aspiration? It is possible that if an Acas advisor attempted to use the definitions offered in contemporary research that a 'box ticking' exercise would ensue. For example, has the behaviour been experienced at least weekly? Has the behaviour been experienced for at 26 weeks? In reviewing the results of this research in regard to defining workplace bullying, there would appear to be little benefit to the helpline advisor or caller in employing academic definitions. Instead, it is proposed here that a descriptive explanation of how workplace bullying may manifest itself could be made available that helps advisors proactively contextualise workplace bullying in such a way as to somehow give them insight into the phenomenon from a practical case study type narrative.

There is also evidence in non-scholarly publications that definitions in workplace bullying are difficult to determine. For example, the Acas 'Employee guide to bullying and harassment at work' uses examples to illustrate workplace bullying and rather than offer a definition uses examples such as 'Bullying may be characterised as ...' This avoidance of being specific is also apparent in academic literature. For example, rather than specify a definition, Einarsen (1999) talks of the 'nature of bullying' whereupon he describes what may be condensed into a definition if one so chose. Hoel et al (2004) refers to bullying becoming a reality when negative behaviour manifests itself in negative outcomes. Again, it appears that Hoel, who may be considered an experienced workplace bullying scholar, is avoiding being specific and defining the phenomenon being discussed. Notelaars et al (2006) prior to defining workplace bullying offer a caveat that there is 'some consensus over definitions', adding 'in Europe at least'. Those researchers who

have adopted an interpretive approach appear to have made efforts to either avoid offering a definition or have critiqued those researchers who have suggested or cited a specific definition, (for example, Liefvooghe and Olafsson, 1999, Lewis, 2002 and McCarthy, 2003). If a structured empirical approach to definitions does not particularly benefit the Acas helpline advisor, could an interpretive approach to explaining workplace bullying help them in their role? There is evidence in the results presented thus far that suggests the interview participants and focus group participants found some difficulty in defining workplace bullying. This thesis argues that this may be because of the subjectivity and the wide range of contexts that may be evident when a helpline advisor receives a telephone call. The complexity that the advisor has to tackle, and the time in which they have to do this, coupled with the interaction being by telephone with someone they have never met, is unlikely to be aided by multifaceted interpretive explanations of Byzantine proportions.

The research debate has however provided definitional assistance which may be of some help in addressing the results contained in this thesis. Numerous participants in the research found workplace bullying difficult to define, others related workplace bullying to other constructs such as equality, sexual harassment, stress, and political correctness. These phenomena may have some relation to workplace bullying, however it would be impractical to associate them in any definition. This is because it would be inappropriate to suggest a linkage between workplace bullying and such phenomena and, further any association between them would probably be specific to a particular circumstance making generalisation impractical. From an academic perspective, there would be a requirement to demonstrate that a relationship existed. Could the examples shown above however be employed as proxy labels that are associated with workplace bullying? Labelling in workplace bullying has been well researched both directly and indirectly, (for example, Keashly and Jagatic, 2003 and Saunders et al, 2007). The way in which workplace bullying is labelled by actors in the workplace bullying discourses is argued by the author to be an important contribution to the macro workplace bullying debate. The results discussed in this chapter reveal that defining workplace bullying is a difficult thing for the Acas helpline advisor. It is suggested that descriptions of workplace bullying may manifest themselves in a

myriad of differing ways. A means by which helpline advisors could contextualise the interaction with the caller may benefit the outcome of the intervention.

Can labelling workplace bullying aid defining workplace bullying, particularly in the context of this research? There is evidence in the literature to suggest that bullying is a set of events that can be conceptualised in many ways (Liefvooghe and Olafsson, 1999). Inherent in these 'events' are behaviours of individuals involved in the discourse. It is proffered here that the 'events' could be explicitly labelled, for example, 'abusive supervision', (Keashly and Jagatic (2003) citing Tepper (2000)). The label may be considered to have a much clearer meaning than the term 'workplace bullying'. The behaviours, however, that may be experienced within the confines of the label may be more subtle and implicitly interpreted, but could be more easily detected through the lens of a recognisable label. There are a variety of labels that are associated with workplace bullying, for example, workplace deviance (Robinson and Bennett, 1995), generalised workplace abuse, (Richman et al, 1999), emotional abuse at work (Keashly, 2001), occupational violence (Mayhew et al, 2004), and horizontal violence (Curtis et al, 2006). It seems possible that by combining labels with behaviours that are cited in other workplace bullying definitions, a more rounded understanding of workplace bullying, or indeed inappropriate work behaviours may be presented which agencies such as Acas may find useful when intervening in cases of workplace bullying.

Conclusions

Having discussed the results in the context of the existing definitions of workplace bullying, it could be concluded that the definitions that have been promulgated from the early research into workplace bullying may have limited use based on the results of this research. It has been shown that the research participants have difficulty in defining workplace bullying; they are sometimes reluctant to define it and sometimes relate the phenomenon to numerous other constructs that may have some relationship to workplace bullying. Whilst it cannot be generalised, it appears that the difficulties and complexities encountered by participants in explaining definitions may be related to the subjectivity of workplace bullying. It

has been argued that in a practical sense, academia probably has a role to play in contributing to making definitions more accessible for agencies such as Acas and relating complex scholarly explanations in a manner that can be translated into realistic, useful solutions and strategies for both advisors and callers alike.

The contextualisation of workplace bullying by Acas helpline advisors is an important area of focus for this thesis and has significantly different characteristics to understanding the way that advisors define workplace bullying. During the interviews and focus groups, the questions posed regarding definition could be regarded as a foundation part of the data gathering; the question was simple and did not call for the participant to relate their answer to any particular construct except that the answer related to their work at Acas. The question, asked at the beginning of the interview or focus group was intended to warm the participants to the subject and to encourage them to think about and share their views on the meaning of workplace bullying.

Having established how the participant defined workplace bullying, the researcher's aim was to attempt to understand how the advisor may relate to workplace bullying in the course of them receiving calls. In particular, did the advisor relate to 'triggers' in the discussion that prompted them to contextualise the information being offered by the caller as possible workplace bullying? What signals or information offered by the caller gave them cause to consider the possibility of workplace bullying? Through this questioning, the researcher's aim was to establish if the definition discussion and contextualisation discussion bore resemblances that would help inform the main aim of the thesis. It is clear from these findings that defining workplace bullying is a challenging discussion for the participants. However, being unable to define workplace bullying does not seem to present a difficulty as the many of the participants agree that workplace bullying is about the perceived experiences of the target. Therefore, a lack of a succinct definition does not prohibit the advisor from being able to deal with workplace bullying enquiries.

Chapter six will now move on to examine the results and the way in which Acas advisors contextualise the information they receive from callers. This

contextualisation is aimed at understanding how workplace bullying is identified by advisors and what attempts they make to seek relevant information or passively process the information they are offered.

Chapter 8: How Staff at Acas Contextualise Workplace Bullying

Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the reader to the way in which Acas helpline advisors define workplace bullying. This analysis provided a foundation on which the remainder of the results can be built upon, now that an explanation has been offered that sets out the advisors' opinions on the definition. It therefore follows that examining and comprehending an understanding of how workplace bullying is contextualised by Acas advisors is important, because without this understanding, the thesis could not possibly make any claims as to the role that they play during intervention episodes. Whilst the reader may draw their own conclusions as to how workplace bullying may be contextualised, it is fundamental to this thesis that an understanding of how the advisor contextualises workplace bullying is explored, examined, and critically analysed.

Initially, this chapter will explore how Acas helpline advisors identify possible examples of workplace bullying. It will also examine if as a community, the advisor population socially constructs workplace bullying through interaction between themselves and others in the social networks, for example, friends, family, and media interaction.

How is this different to defining workplace bullying? In defining workplace bullying, the question posed to the participants is a direct, single clear question. Whilst it is evident from the results that the responses offered were not particularly in keeping with the simplicity and consistency of the question, the replies can be traced to a common point in the interview process; that is, the replies regarding definitions all appeared in response to the one question regarding definition.

In understanding the context, the discourse between researcher and participant is a more fluid, less structured, exploration. This exploration aims to understand what

language and other indicators may contribute to the helpline advisor being able to construct a meaning that gives advisors reasons to consider that workplace bullying may be the motive for the call to Acas. Comments pertaining to the contextualisation of workplace bullying occurred during interviews. For example, what factors in the discussion have influenced the helpline advisor to think that the issue being discussed may be workplace bullying? Are there explicit triggers or comments that lead the helpline advisor to immediately conclude the caller is citing workplace bullying as the reason for their call? If the caller is vague or verbose, or for example, the conversation is convoluted and long, are there factors in the conversation that may provide some form of indication to the advisor that workplace bullying could be apparent? How is the helpline advisor's position influenced if it is the employer calling, or possibly even the person being accused of bullying?

The author argues that the way in which the helpline advisor constructs their perception of workplace bullying and the context in which this meaning is placed is important. The meaning that helpline advisors attribute to workplace bullying is possibly a rich data set that could provide a valuable contribution to the workplace bullying research debate. This is because the helpline advisors are referring to actual cases of alleged workplace bullying that have been discussed with them, probably in detail, from a myriad of different sources. They will likely have gathered and compiled a significant personalised database of experiences relating to many different circumstances over varying periods of time that would be particularly difficult to collect as part of a structured academic research project. If understanding the context that helpline advisors attribute to workplace bullying can be appropriately interpreted, then this will provide a contribution to understanding the role that the Acas advisor fulfils, which is the aim of this thesis.

Presentation of Results

The presentation of the results in this chapter has been distilled from the interview and focus group transcripts. The results relate to the ways that the participants contextualised workplace bullying in their role. As previously, the researcher is identified as 'PW', and the participants by the pseudonym assigned to them to

ensure their identity is protected. The cameo portraits previously presented provide an insight into the participants involved in this research.

The results have been clustered to focus on various aspects of the way that the participants contextualise workplace bullying. First, findings are presented that focus on responses where the respondent appears to make no attempt to contextualise the situation being described to them. This scenario suggests that the advisor provides information based on what they hear the caller say. There may be little attempt to interpret or build upon the information by forming a dialogue, and the advisor appears to generally avoid building a relationship with the caller.

PW *When you are speaking with someone who claims to have been bullied, how do you assess the situation to know that you have understood the context?*

P1 *Erm, but it's about listening and it's about, erm, I think it's about the questions that you ask. I can't tell you anymore than that. I only have one side to the problem and that's not likely to be balanced so you have to be careful. They might say something that completely contradicts what was said earlier and because you remember ... you just know. But it's not my job to judge, it's nobody's job to judge whether somebody's being bullied and we very, erm, clearly steer away from ever showing too much sympathy. Empathy yes, but if you start to be too sympathetic then they tend to clutch to you and you can't necessarily, erm, get that person to see the situation they are in from a different viewpoint.*

PW *How would you explore that?*

P1 *Well, I would try to avoid using the word 'bullying'. Once some people hear something they, well erm, well they latch onto it and that becomes the issue. They can go off and tell people because now they've got a name for the problem. It's not my role to give them a name as I don't know what's going on do I? I try to ask questions that will help them explain the problem to me, though erm, well, it doesn't always work if people just want an answer, like if they have a good case in the tribunal. That's not for me to judge, I never do, and that's our rules.*

The respondent in this case appears to be distancing herself from engaging with the caller. Her reply may give the impression that she believes that she knows what constitutes workplace bullying, however she is not necessarily willing to share that knowledge with callers. The response offered in this case would appear rational. She is clear in setting out that she only has one side of a story, but notes that she may be looking for signs in the conversation that the caller's description of events is not consistent. Does this behaviour mean that she is actually contextualising the scenario? It would seem that this may well be the case as she adds that it is acceptable to offer empathy but not sympathy.

An important comment in the response is that she avoids labelling a description offered by a caller as workplace bullying. There is a suggestion that this is to avoid giving the caller a perception of a 'crutch' on which they may be able to associate their problems, particularly if the caller wishes to make the situation they are experiencing one that might result in a claim in an Employment Tribunal. These responses provide a clue that the advisor may not wish to contextualise a call regarding workplace bullying because it may project an inappropriate impression to the caller.

PW *When you're listening to somebody in terms of what they say to you are there particular triggers in what you hear that make you think this may be workplace bullying?*

P4 *No because it's not my place to judge whether it's bullying or not.*

PW *But how do you form your opinion?*

P4 *Well I wouldn't form an opinion as to whether it's bullying, all I can do is tell them what their options are, but to be perfectly honest they're a bit limited. You know if it's a state where their supervisor is actually doing the bullying, it's hard ... people who are in that position usually feel cowed and threatened anyway and they don't want you telling them, "You need to make this formal. You need to put it in writing." But these are the people that are being bullied and are frightened. It's difficult. It's hard to make a ... hard to make a connection for them but you can ... you get an inkling from ... their tone and their manner on the phone. You get some people who come on and possibly are just trying to be vindictive, "I think I'm being bullied I want to do something about it," but you can ... I mean I'm saying you can usually tell, but really who knows because I don't know who's on the other end of the phone so I don't know but all I can do is give them the advice that we have available to give to them.*

The reply offered here builds from a position of no opinion or response to one that infers he actually does make a relatively complex self assessment of the situation in attempting to contextualise the situation. The point of interest here is that the participant is replying to the question in terms of passing a judgement to himself. It is clear that the researcher's question has been interpreted in such a way that the respondent perceives he is being asked how he would judge a caller's comments. The participant adds, bolstering his position of objectivity and neutrality, that he would not even form an opinion. This position is consistent with the training and policies within Acas to ensure that the employee does not take sides or favour a particular representation in any case. Whilst this is laudable and appropriate, it is also noticeable from these comments that the participant actually does form an opinion. The opinion formed may not be specifically about the issue that the caller is facing, but is about how the caller may be feeling. This is an important distinction in the helpline advisor's response; the point of focus they would appear

to adopt is the caller as a person, not seemingly as a person with a problem in the workplace that has to be labelled, as suggested by P7.

PW *Appreciating that you have to be impartial, how would you gauge if they are being bullied or not?*

P7 *I wouldn't gauge, I wouldn't judge it, and I would just give them the facts. I've been doing this job for six years, so I just tend to dish out the facts now. I think, you know, if you give too much sympathy or empathy to them, they just sort of dissolve into tears, so it's best just to give them the facts on how to deal with it.*

I listen to them, I listen to what they've got to say and then I just tell them the ways that they could resolve it by talking to their manager or whoever it is that's bullying, you know, explain to them because they may not understand that their behaviour is bullying, and that you're perceiving it as bullying. I mean, some managers do shout and bawl and scream ... they would probably say it's just their way but if some poor little soul thinks that they're being bullied by that shouting, then it's bullying.

This respondent appears to have reached a stage whereby her experience has led her to remain detached to avoid any emotional engagement in the caller relationship regardless of how transitory this may be. Her apparent disinterest in understanding and empathising leads her to provide a simple response that she refers to as 'facts'. She explains however, at the end of her response that bullying is subjective. It is again argued by the author that it is apparent that the helpline advisors and their colleagues are attempting at the outset of the engagement to maintain an impartial personal perspective, reflecting the objectivity of their organisational policies and procedures, yet they develop a perspective which acknowledges the subjectivity of workplace bullying. There also appears to be an indication that the subjective interpretation they possess is somewhat suppressed, possibly to ensure that they remain compliant with organisational policies. Whilst this is an appropriate aim by the helpline advisor, it seems that a balance has to be

created. The advisor should be able to make a valuable interpretation of the caller's needs, yet respect the framework within which they have to conduct themselves.

The following respondents possibly create a balance in remaining impartial, but also contextualising the situation they face by exploring the caller's position through questioning and understanding.

PW *How do you piece together the clues callers may give you that would make you think that they could be getting bullied at work?*

P15 *Individuals calling in, um, yeah, it's just, its just fact of life for some people and they don't even realise they're being bullied some people. Some people have worked like this for so long, that's just the way it is for them. They don't know any different.*

PW *They don't realise they're being bullied?*

P15 *They could be, well some of them could be in a situation and that they are stressed so you know they go, they go to the doctors, they're signed off work because of stress. They might ring the help line to get some information because err, there's something that the employers said or done, and the story starts to unfold then because sometimes they become very distressed ... and explain situations that have happened in the work place and it's when you sort of hear the whole story ... once they start to talk. You start to realise, well you know, why this person is feeling like this.*

It's difficult to think of actual triggers. I mean it's where you can get people to sort of go back and recount conversations they've had or things that have happened to them and maybe a repeat pattern showing, um, its, you sort of develop a sixth sense when you're working on the helpline to ask more in-depth questions.

PW *How does the questioning help you form your opinion?*

P15 *Well its not until you literally ask the question do you think you're being treated differently because ... of your nationality, your race, your colour, your position, anything really ... it's just developing that line of questioning um, it's a very difficult route to go down sometimes ... because you're dealing with people who are very emotional. So err, as I say it, it's something that develops with experience.*

This respondent makes an important point at the start of her reply. She asserts that some employees do not realise they are being bullied and therefore would not contact the helpline about workplace bullying. It is evident from the pen portraits in Chapter five that this is an experienced employee with management experience within Acas. She espouses the need to explore the caller's situation before trying to offer support. She refers to listening to the stories that the caller may have and then piecing together the various components of the story to form what she believes is a representation of what has happened in the caller's workplace life. She also makes two other important observations in attempting to contextualise the episodes that may be the reason for the caller contacting Acas. First, she suggests that the caller may have to be explicitly questioned to encourage them to think more explicitly about their treatment in the workplace. Second, the way she explains how and when this is done is particularly interesting as she suggests that helpline advisors develop a sixth sense. How can a sixth sense and a set of objective policies that deal with factual information based on specific requests co-habit? The following respondent gives the impression that this is what they try to achieve.

PW *If you receive calls from people who claim to be bullied, how do you build a picture in your mind that helps you assess what is going on?*

P8 *It's difficult because it's obviously dependent on what they're actually saying to you. It will vary from person to person and obviously, we're seeing it from only one side. I'm trying to give a balanced view of this*

and what it is, someone might be making a complaint thinking they're being bullied, depending on what they're saying it might be firm management, so you need to perhaps go round all the areas and sort of explain what bullying could be seen as. Then it's for them to decide and think whether they'd construe it as bullying or not because they've then got to open to themselves. When people say my manager seems to be picking on me and quite often it's probably a performance related issue and they've then got it into their head it's bullying. The first thing that comes out is it's bullying, so we need to sometimes ask relevant questions to find out what's going on behind this. I'm not making a judgement on bullying at all but I am trying to establish how the alleged bullying may have come about if say there is a poor performance record or absenteeism for example.

There are some calls we get which it's so obvious they're being bullied, some calls where just say its firm management, so it's difficult to sort of build a picture. I don't try and get a mental picture too much because it would tend to colour what I might say, although it shouldn't do, but I mean the problem is you try and side perhaps slightly without realising you're doing it.

This respondent appears to adopt an approach where he attempts to explore without encroaching into emotional relationships with the caller. He does this in the first instance by not assuming that bullying is necessarily taking place. His attempt to assess whether the caller is actually the subject of robust management is one that enables him to question without drawing himself into the alleged workplace bullying episode. This approach is valuable in understanding the way in which helpline advisors contextualise workplace bullying. This employee may not contextualise the situation as bullying himself, but offers a portfolio of information and suggestions to the caller that allows them to determine if workplace bullying could be the issue, based on the information the helpline advisor has been offered. In taking this approach it is important to note that the advisor is not suggesting that the caller is the target of workplace bullying.

Rather, he is offering information from which the caller may deduce that they are being bullied at work.

There is a subtle and important difference between suggesting to someone that they are being bullied and providing information to someone that may lead them to conclude that they are being bullied. This is because the manifestation of the bullying episode is being left for the caller to construct. The caller may be contrasting different parts of the information offered by Acas, for example reference to poor performance or absenteeism. The conclusion reached may not help the workplace bullying definition debate as each situation will be unique. For the purposes of this Chapter, however, it is an important result to illustrate how the helpline advisor contextualises workplace bullying without conveying their conclusions to the caller.

Participant P6 below provides some clues as to how the helpline advisor contextualises workplace bullying and remains detached from the emotional and subjective engagement that risks them creating ‘mental pictures’ to which the previous respondent referred.

PW *Are there any specific triggers that come up in your mind for you to think this is bullying?*

P6 *I think with us we're impartial anyway ... we're only having one side of the story so we have to remember that and I think we are used to having to do this with all the calls we take so we don't make assumptions.*

So first, we just try and ask the questions so that we can find out what's... what's happened. So, for instance, if someone ... feels as if they're being picked on; they may have had their hours changed, preferential treatment may be given to a colleague or they may have had their hours cut. It's just going through the process, trying to get to the relevant information, simple questions, get the facts ... without getting war and peace from them ... automatically going through your

mental procedures we all have.

PW *Which procedures are you talking about?*

P6 *They're not really procedures I suppose. They are what you use to make sure you get through your calls. You can't just throw information at them, but also you haven't got all day, so it's a case of being efficient really and keeping to the point. To be honest, I've had callers who by the time they've finished I've forgotten what they started out on. How can I help them then? If I take some control of the call then at least I can provide some signposting for them hopefully.*

This response suggests that there are some key points which are important in understanding how helpline advisors contextualise bullying. First, she explicitly notes that she is only hearing one side of a situation. It may be that she constructs discourses drawing on previous conversations in a way that helps her 'standardise' her understanding or sub-consciously represent the other side of the argument, thus playing an unseen and unheard devil's advocate. In any contextualisation, a person is comparing and contrasting different situations and circumstances to locate the reality they are experiencing on a continuum of knowledge and familiarity with which they can make rational sense. Is the way in which she contrasts the story she hears with her personal experiences a vehicle for contextualising workplace bullying? The respondent's mental discipline appears to be a characteristic that helps her make sense of the caller's situation.

Second, in her response she refers to procedures that arguably do not exist in a formal sense. The helpline advisor uses her own procedure to 'control the call'. Is this an effective way of being able to contextualise the caller's situation? Her response infers that this may be a method that helps understand how best to intervene and provide appropriate support. It seems that the respondent is using her experience to isolate the important and relevant pieces of information that are being provided by mentally 'sifting' the stories to help guide the caller during the process of intervention. Furthermore, by personally taking 'control' of the call, she appears to be avoiding the trap of emotional engagement that may cloud her

judgement, be a stress on her or the caller, and delay the usefulness of the intervention. The benefit of taking seriously the contextualisation of what may be a workplace bullying incident is explained by respondent P17 below.

PW *How do you think helpline advisors can identify if a caller is referring to workplace bullying?*

P17 *You have to be careful; people can call us and let us tell them what the problem is. That's not what we do. We give advice based on what we are told. If we start saying to people, "Oh you're being bullied, then we are making a massive judgement about something we really can't understand based on a single conversation. I would be encouraging helpline advisors not to refer to treatment as bullying or anything else for that matter.*

I have jumped in on occasions by just stating legal or policy stuff, then when I have heard the whole story thought again and that can be difficult to back track out of.

PW *I understand the charter you work within, but how do advisors provide the right service if they don't interpret what they hear?*

P17 *Of course, they'll interpret it and discuss with their colleagues but in giving advice, they must keep their responses broad. At the end of the day, the advice for a case of bullying may be very similar to discrimination or harassment but the course of action that may be best could be very different. The devil's in the detail!*

There are two points in this response that warrant particular comment. First, the respondent is clear that a lack of understanding can result in misplaced or inaccurate advice that may be difficult to retract later. Second and possibly more importantly, he uses the phrase 'the devil is in the detail' referring to what appears to be possible legal situations that may ensue from advice given. The respondent did not elaborate on the implications of his comment explicitly; however, the

author suggests that certain inferences may be considered. Is it that discrimination and harassment both have legal meanings that are possibly better understood than workplace bullying?

Could it be that the contextualising of workplace bullying may be influenced by the feasibility of legal redress in the Employment Tribunal? The litigious element in society may argue that workplace bullying deserves to fall into a category that warrants financial compensation. Helpline advisors may well be influenced in what courses of action could be open to callers and these options would seem to have some bearing on the way in which they contextualise workplace bullying. Is legal redress a relevant consideration for advisors? Whilst there are likely to be mixed opinions as to how this may resolve problems of workplace bullying, it seems that there is a benefit in considering legal redress as shown by respondent P13 below.

PW *When you have a conversation with someone and you suspect from listening to them that it may be workplace bullying, are there particular triggers that might make you think that way?*

P13 *I find that it's always useful to explore the history; its not like they just ring up is it?*

PW *Why do you say that?*

P13 *Well, I find that there's often a history, like there's been a disciplinary and they say that they know why they are doing this to them and its unacceptable. That may be a trigger but it also makes me think that they have just got an assertive manager. That's not bullying then is it?*

PW *I'm not sure.*

P13 *No, it's easier to tell when they have difficulty in describing it. You know, its just loads of stuff that is happening and they are not making sense of it but know it's bad. I don't think some realise its wrong or*

illegal or anything,

PW *Can you share some examples?*

P13 *... it's hopeless, a single mum who ... her last pay packet was withheld before Christmas and you know here we are, three or four months on and its only just been sorted by a Tribunal. ... Of course, I've got to be very careful where I am; you know I don't know what the Tribunal might say ... The point is she saw that as a pay problem, but when you quizzed her, it was obviously bullying tactics, as this wasn't the only problem she had at work and they probably wanted her out. Some companies think they can do this, just by grinding people down, and they certainly got to her. Its what she takes to the tribunal is the problem for her ... what's she most likely to win on? Withholding pay is a lot more straightforward than bullying isn't it?*

The response from P13 gives the impression that he takes an approach to his work that assumes there is always more to the situation than the caller may suggest. The description in words of this respondent's reply does not necessarily serve this thesis well. His enthusiasm and passion for exploring how best to help callers was exceptional, when compared to other advisors. It was apparent that he committed himself fully to providing an exceptional service trying to provide the fairest, appropriate, and complete intervention.

The particular point of interest in this response is the example he offers about the 'single mum's pay packet'. As he suggests, the obvious issue was that of withholding pay, however, it appears that his questioning led him to conclude that there was more to the situation than simply pay. This raises some interesting points. First, the caller did not appear to recognise the other issues (that are not explained) until these were highlighted through the helpline advisor's questions to her. How did the relationship between the other issues and the pay issue manifest themselves in the contextualisation process for the advisor? It would appear from his reply that this is possibly an experiential factor and exceptionally difficult to quantify and justify. This is because one would have to understand the discourses

that the advisor had experienced. Second, the advisor's apparent suggestion to pursue a formal and legal grievance involved some careful consideration on the basis of the 'safest bet'. This may infer that the advisor could suggest the use of one attribute of the treatment afforded to the caller to leverage remedies in an Employment Tribunal. There is no evidence in these results that suggests such a practice is commonplace. This prompts questions, however, around how workplace bullying can be appropriately challenged if left unaddressed or if it is unclear on what grounds the claim is being made. It may be significant, given that the respondent labelled the caller as a 'single mum', that he personally perceives some form of injustice in single parent families, which in turn could influence his perception of the specific case.

Are helpline advisors contextualising workplace bullying behind a mask of other poor workplace practices, such as discrimination, in order to offer advice on addressing the situation? The respondents, P14 and P12 below offer an explanation in their replies that may provide a signpost to the question of 'masks'.

P14 *Some of the most arguably ... challenging calls from an emotional point of view are when you're dealing with bullying, you know instinctively that they are looking for a just outcome to the problem ... for it to stop. It's well, almost as if they need to feel justice has been done, it's easy to spot in any call because they're well not being logical or anything. They can't piece it together and they want someone to make sense of it for them. It makes our job almost impossible. They have to find something they can cling to that will make sense when they complain.*

P12 *Yeah, I've spoken to people who can't tell you what the problem actually is but want apologies ... they just don't know what bullying is I suppose. Even when I have explained the situation, or at least my understanding of it, they still don't get it. They'll say "What do you mean?" and you don't like to keep telling people that they are getting bullied.*

There is evidence here that callers to the helpline are confused and distressed. If those calling the helpline are severely disturbed by the situation they face and cannot make sense of their experiences, it is likely that they may be helped if they can attach some form of label to their experiences. This is alluded by P9.

PW *So when they tell stories, are there triggers in those stories that make you think, this could be workplace bullying?*

P9 *Err, quite often it is where, um, an employee says, "I can't take anymore", and then they come to a point when something just snap ... and they feel they just can't carry on.*

That's one of the main things but also where, erm, you can tell there is a situation where somebody's making a lot of very unpleasant comments or there's a certain type of behaviour going on. And perhaps employees don't label it themselves as bullying but ... then you think, well yes that does sound like bullying. I think that sometimes people are afraid to use the word bullying so you have to introduce the subject yourself. It's a fine line to draw and you don't always get it right. If you can get them to see the signposts you are offering then that's probably the best you can expect as it's not something that can be simply just fixed.

Participant P9 suggests that it may be important for the advisor not to share the conclusions reached during the call. It is notable that they state that introducing the concept of workplace bullying to the caller may not be the most appropriate course of action and may have negative repercussions. He adds that a successful outcome to a workplace bullying call may be as little as an acceptance by the caller to appreciate the situation they are in and to recognise the options that may be open to them. This may pose a significant challenge in the helpline advisor's role. Whilst they may carefully listen and contextualise the caller's comments, drawing on experience, policies, and legal awareness, it may be that they do not share this in a way that is clear and unambiguous. For example, if the caller is overly confused, distressed or emotional, the signpost offered by the helpline advisor may be towards a different agency that may be able better to deal with the

explanation and action that could be required. Whilst this may be done in the caller's best interests, there is no way of being able to understand how the caller pursued the advice offered. Is this in the caller's best interests? Participant P11 offers a dimension to this question that may encourage an examination from another necessary perspective.

PW *What do you mean when you say that bullying is a difficult subject to approach?*

P11 *Well, it's basically because it's emotional.*

PW *How does emotion affect it?*

P11 *It makes it more difficult to approach. People don't like to be told they are being bullied. I find people deal with terms such as discrimination because that means something to them. It's not easy telling someone that they are being bullied.*

PW *What makes you think they have been bullied?*

P11 *I'm not sure they have been sometimes. I think that sometimes its just over management*

PW *What is over management?*

P11 *Well nobody likes being told that they are not very good at something do they so when you have an individual let's say they are saying "well you know I was unfairly dismissed and I was bullied and harassed." Well it may well be that that person is underperforming, or was underperforming and that ultimately the main reason for their dismissal was because of that. They need to know that so they don't kid themselves that they are a victim. Personally, I always make sure that I ask these questions.*

But the lead up to that dismissal [from employment], that individual

may well have felt that they were being bullied and harassed when in fact, although they felt that and you can't take away those feelings, it wouldn't necessarily be deemed as bullying and harassment by an employment tribunal.

The context offered by P11 is that the caller has to reflect themselves on the assessment of being bullied at work as well as making claims about others. He is clear in stating that he sees bullying as an emotional phenomenon. It is evident that he is inferring that people find difficulty in dealing with bullying, suggesting that other terms such as discrimination have more clear meaning. His approach is also explicit in challenging the assertion of the caller. Whilst he expresses empathy in recognising that bullying is an unpleasant term to discuss with people, he also takes a firm position by suggesting that if they do not like being referred to as a target, maybe it is something else that they need to examine in their working lives. It is possible at this juncture to juxtapose the comments made by P11 and P9. Combined, these responses may provide a balanced contextualisation of workplace bullying for callers who may not recognise workplace bullying or may not wish to recognise that bullying is not the only component in their workplace difficulties.

The results discussed thus far are from people who are employed on helpline duties. The response below from participant P14 had been included as she works in the field with organisations as well as having had helpline experience. Her reply suggests a far more complex understanding of the situation.

PW *Are there characteristics in your dealings with people who contact Acas that give you cause to think the issue is workplace bullying?*

P14 *Yeah, I mean, there's a whole list, isn't there, of things that can be used in a way in which to, erm, humiliate, denigrate, undermine. You know, in some senses that, an abuse or misuse of power, however power is manifested; it doesn't have to be authoritative like management. Power of course could be the power of the person, the power of the individual,*

but however power is used, it's used, it has the outcome of leaving somebody, you know, a quivering, wreck. You have to be careful really because some people with these behaviours, manage the outcome so it doesn't affect their personal wellbeing.

I suppose what it doesn't display is some of the consequences, some of the outcomes ... Some people can bat it back and, you know, you get the people that can be very practiced at standing up to bullies and once they've stood up to, they back off and go away. The behaviour is still bullying behaviour but the outcome is different for that particular individual so you have to look at what is being said to you in the context of the person saying it. You can't just say because you hear something that sounds like bullying that the person is being bullied.

There are individuals when they describe what's happening, you get a glimpse of what's happened because of the, of the psychological outcome. Another person it wouldn't have that effect on, but it does have that effect on some people. So, yes, there are a range of behaviours which I would think ... would be regarded ... as unfair and you just don't treat people like that.

The respondent's level of understanding suggests that a telephone conversation alone may be insufficient in attempting to deal with bullying. This may be because the relationship in a single telephone conversation could be insufficient to understand, interpret, contextualise, and construct an intervention that is likely to be successful. It seems apparent here that for an intervention into workplace bullying to be successful, it is essential that it is appropriately contextualised and an understanding of the whole episode is required.

Finally, there is evidence from advisors that those who may perpetrate workplace bullying have a requirement for intervention to help support them and hopefully remedy inappropriate behaviours.

PW ... *When you listen to what they have to say, are there triggers in that conversation where you think, 'this is bullying?*

P5 ... *I take calls from the other side complaining ... you know, from the bully ... saying, "I've got this position and they're taking me to an employment tribunal or they've said this in a grievance and this is quite ridiculous ... they're saying, "Well this is quite ridiculous in the way they're dealing with me," ... and all of a sudden they'll come out and they'll give a situation and purely by what they've described has occurred ... I'll say, "Well do you know ... do you not see that actually you've been invited to a disciplinary for bullying, you know, is that not a possibility?" ... the bullies themselves don't want to reveal that they're being invited to task. This can be a real moment of wake up for them as no one has ever said anything before. It's how they react afterwards that is important and I would say most people will make an effort, but you don't see what happens behind closed doors do you?*

Whilst this was the only case of a participant raising the issue of bullies calling the helpline, it does serve to suggest that bullies may equally be in need of intervention strategies that could be offered by Acas. The point of particular interest here relates to a construct that has been formulated by the caller. Why has a possible grievance that has led to a disciplinary action come as a surprise? This situation may mean that when helpline advisors contextualise a caller's comments to infer that workplace bullying could be the issue, that the bully is unaware of their actions. How would this affect the intervention that may take place? If one combines the perceived lack of awareness of the alleged bully with the lack of awareness of the situation of the target, then such awareness offers an example of what the helpline advisor may be trying to unpick during a call. Whilst this may be an extreme portrayal of a bullying episode, it does help provide a clue as to the potential enormity of the task that faces the helpline advisor when intervening in cases of workplace bullying.

Discussion

Whereas chapter seven discussed the definitional debate, this chapter has examined how an Acas advisor contextualises the notion of workplace bullying within the setting of a call to their helpline. The frame for this chapter therefore leverages the definitional discussion, but importantly advances it to deal with the way that workplace bullying is identified, recognised, and analysed by Acas advisors in their interactions with callers.

Why is the way that Acas advisors contextualise and explain workplace bullying important? Rayner (1998) cited in Ferris (2004) makes clear that employees intuitively understand the risks associated with approaching their organisational representatives. Ferris (2004) explains that organisational representative responses to allegations of workplace bullying appear to be ineffective and in some cases actually make the situation worse. This has significant implications for organisations such as Acas. Acas claims to have an enviable reputation, (<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1441>, 18th September, 2008) and that in 2007 the helpline received over 900,000 calls from employees and employers. These two factors mean that there is likely to be a probability that Acas may be a primary alternative source of support for targets of workplace bullying, particularly from SME organisations who may not have dedicated HR or employee representation services. This thesis suggests that where third party intervention is more likely, an understanding of the potential workplace situations experienced may benefit the third party in providing a possible solution. Therefore, a detailed understanding of workplace bullying is something that Acas should reasonably possess given the number of calls received. This understanding warrants further discussion here.

There is first a need to seek an understanding of what it is that Acas is trying to achieve in its interventions into workplace bullying via the telephone helpline. This is because to examine how advisors contextualise and explain workplace bullying, one must first examine what it is that is trying to be achieved and therefore what contexts may be sought by advisors in the course of them discharging their duties. The helpline aspirations can be explained by drawing on information provided from Acas managers during conversations with the author

and from published Acas reports and documents. Acas aims to provide responses to callers that enable them to deal with the matter on which they have sought advice. Acas adds that the caller should be able to pursue the matter in question understanding what options and courses of action are available, (HYPERTEXT REF. 3).

Advisors, who take an objective and detached approach to the interaction with callers aim to provide the information needed without contextualising or assessing the information provided, on the basis that it is not a matter for them to consider in such a way. This unprejudiced and maybe dispassionate approach is understandable. Acas has both procedures and a culture that espouses and demand impartiality. This specific organisational characteristic is evident and explicit in the way in which helpline advisors work and communicate with callers. Does this dominant cultural attribute contribute in some way to the approach that Acas advisors may adopt when dealing with callers? This thesis cannot address this question in a comprehensive manner and as such, the question serves as an area for future research. However, it seems plausible that cultural norms may play some role in the way employees behave and react to certain situations.

Acas advisors perceive that their role is to provide the facts based on a strict process based interaction. This assumes that they have been able to define that a workplace bullying situation exists in order to make an appropriate response, however prescriptive that may be. It may be that the caller has told them they are being bullied and the advisor sees no need to challenge or explore what has been said. Rayner (1999) stated that a definition for workplace bullying needs to be fit for purpose and that using the term bully may conjour up different connotations of experiences suffered in the workplace. In this case, it would seem that no definition is needed. That is, there is no requisite for an agreement or acknowledgement between the parties that such an episode is taking place; the advisor acts simply on what is said to him/her by the caller. This still demands a level of acceptance by the advisor of the information given by the caller. Could this be what Einarsen et al (2003) mean when they discuss the notion of objective versus subjective bullying? They suggest that little is known about 'interrater' reliability in cases of workplace bullying; that is, the agreement between target

and a third party about a workplace bullying incident. In the case of Acas advisors who simply provide the information, it would seem that an argument for an 'interrater' reliability test would have little value. They appear to have no interest in establishing a common point of consensus over the workplace bullying episode because their perceived terms of engagement do not require them to understand, but rather to divulge impartial information only.

Other advisors clearly do wish to examine, and in some way test, the caller's comments and their understanding of them, to establish what circumstances may be prevailing in the workplace. Even when this is the case, participants in this research were clear in that they would never show any agreement or endorsement of the allegations the caller was making. In these cases would an interrater reliability test however subtle or subconscious in the mind of the advisor, be a useful tool for Acas to employ? This complex question requires careful consideration. Frese and Zapf (1988) cited in Einarsen et al (2003), claim that subjective workplace bullying can be defined as a situation where the event is highly influenced by the individual's cognitive and emotional processing, whereas objective workplace bullying is observed independently of the individual's cognitive processing. With workplace bullying often being a subtle and discreet means of targeting individuals, (for example Namie, 2003 and Duffy et al, 2002), this claim appears to fall short of being able to explain how a level of objectivity can be determined if the episode is not observed. Further, and in the case of the Acas advisor, if the episode has been explained and the advisor empathises with it, is this enough to merit objectivity? In order to establish objectivity must the advisor have experienced the episode with the target? If it is the latter, then clearly, the helpline could not be expected to be able to make any form of contextualisation in an objective sense as they are only interpreting the information that is being offered by the caller. If, however, the interpretation is conducted using the skill and experience that the advisor possesses, can an initial assessment be made that allows further contextualisation to take place? Einarsen et al (2003) suggest that bullying is often a subjective process of reconstruction and it seems that this conclusion may accommodate the objective versus subjective debate. Finally, if someone perceives that they have been bullied, then regardless of the objectivity, the perception is likely to remain. Therefore, does

this conclusion render the objective/subjective debate relatively without meaning or purpose?

The means by which Frese and Zapf (1988), cited in Einarsen et al (2003), define objectivity and subjectivity fails to satisfy the dilemmas that face Acas advisors in fulfilling their role. First, Acas advisors have to show some form of objectivity and impartiality in their response. They cannot determine, however, the accuracy of the caller's comments in the way that Frese and Zapf (1988) advocate to validate such objectivity. Second, the results suggest that those advisors who simply provide information without contextualising the subjectivity of the workplace bullying episodes are able to provide a less than whole intervention. That is, the information provided could be deemed a 'vanilla flavour' or that 'one size suits all'. Therefore, there is a need to remain objective in one's response whilst having subjectively contextualised the discourse that has taken place between caller and advisor in order to draw some conclusions as to what may be taking place and how advice may be best placed as an intervention. Having subjectively contextualised the comments made by a caller, the advisor is then faced with the difficulty of mentally labelling the different parts of the landscape that has been portrayed. Is this simply a case of attributing a label to workplace bullying?

Workplace bullying is not a homogenous construct (Zapf et al, 2003) and has many components that can affect the target depending on the approach the perpetrator takes. There does not appear to be specific literature that addresses the interpretations made by those who are an intrinsic part either of the workplace bullying episode or more relevantly to this thesis, those who are intervening in an episode. Zapf et al (2003) note that the approach may depend on many factors identified through analysis of responses to the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ), (Einarsen and Raknes, 1997). For example, the type of bullying could be personalised bullying (for example, bullying targeted at the individual regardless of the workplace situation); work-related bullying (for example bullying targeted at the individual regarding her/his role, work quality, and throughput). It is also noted by Mackenson von Astfeld (2000) cited in Zapf et al (2003) that gender plays a role in what approaches to workplace bullying may be adopted. Does the

lack of homogeneity of workplace bullying increase the difficulty faced by helpline advisors in contextualising the caller's comments in cases of workplace bullying?

Keashly and Jagatic (2003) cite seven behavioural categories linked to 28 behavioural examples that have been the subject of scholarly research. A review of Keashly and Jagatic's (2003) table suggests that the demands placed on the Acas advisor are significant. Is it reasonable to suggest that a helpline advisor can realistically distil such complex information through a telephone call? The requirement of the advisor to listen and understand the caller's situation may assume that the caller is conscious of the reason they are making the call. Whilst this may appear an unusual question, it has been shown in the results that some people do not necessarily associate with the notion of workplace bullying and may not even know it exists in a way that would be familiar to readers of this thesis. For example, Archer (1999) cites many of the behavioural attributes of workplace bullying as part of the cultural characteristics of some organisations. He adds that workplace bullying may be perpetuated through ignorance, on behalf of not only the perpetrator, but also the target.

The potential lack of awareness by the caller, coupled with a disconnected phenomenon like workplace bullying, which appears to have little homogeneity, clearly places a further burden on the Acas advisor as they untangle the relevant webs that overlap within their conversation with the caller. If one also considers the difficulties that Acas advisors had in defining workplace bullying, maybe it becomes feasible to appreciate the challenges they face in contextualising workplace bullying and in delivering an effective intervention. Whilst possibly an extreme scenario, it could be argued that the Acas helpline advisor may be a person who cannot define workplace bullying and is unwilling or unable to contextualise it when speaking to someone who is seeking advice and help about something with which they do not identify. This situation may appear to excessively stress a point, however such a scenario could easily present itself based on the comments received during this research.

The known literature appears to offer little evidence or advice in how such a hypothetically extreme position such as that described above can be avoided. For example, Salin (2003) offers a thorough and detailed description that explains workplace bullying. She explains it, however, to someone looking onto it as a passive observer, not necessarily immersed in it or being drawn into the process, particularly with the express intent to intervene.

The current body of workplace bullying literature appears to be void of guidance that helps explain how dyadic intervention in workplace bullying actually takes place. Chapter three concluded that intervention research in workplace bullying has examined organisational policy and training interventions for example, but has not addressed third party intervention at the dyadic level. What bearing does the level of understanding possessed by researchers about personal relationships within workplace bullying discourses have on the research debate? Without an understanding of such relationships, it would appear that there is a shortcoming in the interpretations of discourses apparent in any workplace bullying episodes. However, might it be possible to derive from this thesis, that without a willingness to develop the relationship between the two parties involved, an appropriate and desirable outcome is unlikely to be reached? There is a need at this juncture, therefore to discuss the way in which the relationship between the advisor and the caller can develop, (if both parties permit it to do so), in order to understand what can happen in the process of intervention.

In chapter five, the notion of the social and personal self, (Deschamps and Devos, 1998), were discussed, (where the social self refers to the identity made available and exposed to others in social settings and the self that is private and intimate within the individual). These assertions on 'identity' could resonate with the results in this thesis. It is clear from the results presented here that different Acas advisors take different approaches to the intervention they provide. Are these approaches different because of the way they contextualise the situation? Can these differences be in part attributed to the way in which they have codified their experiences with other callers and interaction with colleagues resulting in how they then wish to represent themselves as an individual? The earlier comments on identity theory suggest that those advisors who may choose to remain detached

from the caller do so because they may not identify with those callers. Their recognition of self has little or no common ground with which to form a relationship and they therefore self select so as not to engage. Why is it that some advisors embrace the opportunity to investigate and examine the caller's situation in an attempt to contextualise the specific situation to which the caller refers and others do not? Future research could be pursued in trying to understand the social relationships between support agencies, targets of workplace bullying or those being accused of bullying.

This thesis asserts that some advisors locate their self, wearing the work mask of an Acas helpline advisor, as an individual that has transient symbolic relationships with callers. During these discourses, the advisor creates a unique but 'temporary' self that could be described as a 'perfect fit' situated in the particular discourse with that specific caller. The 'organising principle' of the social self (Doise 1998) is important because in order for the advisor to be able to model an appropriate intervention, he/she must be able to mentally organise the principles upon which they will pursue and develop the relationship. This enables the advisor to become a temporary member of the social group with which the caller relates and give the caller the impression that they have joined this group, possibly by demonstrating empathy.

Smith (2006), drawing upon Eisenberg and Strayer (1987), defines empathy as 'an affective response more appropriate to someone else's situation than to one's own'. Specifically, Smith (2006) adds that Cognitive Empathy, (CE), is particularly important. In the context of this thesis and the way that advisors contextualise workplace bullying, Smith's assertions may be applied on a number of fronts. First, citing Byrne and Whitten (1988) Smith claims that CE enhances social functioning, referring to it as 'mental perspective taking; this clearly is a prerequisite for advisors to be able to communicate effectively with callers. Second, CE enables us to understand and attempt to predict behaviours of others in particular mental states. Third, CE facilitates the conversation and social expertise in eliciting information and more generally enables us to assess the accuracy of information being imparted. This seems to suggest that this process might advisors to contextualise the workplace bullying scenario by immersing

themselves in a superficial and very short period of what could be termed as 'telephone-ethnography'.

Emotional contagion, (for example Barsada, 2002), where the participants in a social encounter may mimic moods, behaviours, expressions and vocalizations, could also play a role in the way that the advisor empathises and contextualises the conversation. This assertion however presents a number of challenges. First, how do the empathy and emotional cognition attributes of the relationship between advisor and caller co-habit? Is it the case that the advisor empathises to achieve some form of rapport, or is the empathy actually a result of emotional contagion? Does a cause and effect situation evolve? If so, which one causes the other? Bartel and Saavedra (2000) contest that mimicry between people leads to emotional convergence where they demonstrate a harmony of being in touch with each other. They suggest that by being able to relate to others through behavioural mimicry is a form of entertainment, originating in biology, which reflects spontaneous adjustments in behaviour to match with the behaviour of another. Could helpline advisors be attempting to mimic the caller to solicit better information through a better rapport? There certainly appears to be indications in the results thus far that suggest those advisors who question and investigate may navigate a more rounded perspective in their interpretation and contextualisation of their callers' needs. Caution should be exercised however, in drawing any firm conclusions as other factors are likely to affect the way in which the relationship between caller and advisor develops.

Advisors and callers individual interpretation of themselves may possibly influence the way in which the relationship develops. Is it the case that those advisors who embrace the opportunity to intervene associate themselves in a social category of the caller, possibly along particular dimensions? The results show that some advisors inherently have a more empathetic approach to callers relating to workplace bullying and express an opinion of workplace bullying being 'wrong'. They explain how they question the caller to establish the whole story. In this context, it appears the advisor is choosing to become a part of the caller's social setting; they are electing to modify their social identity in order to relate. It is important to recognise that this does not imply friendship, but rather a

role that is one of help and support predicated on being informed and empathetic. Advisors are offering themselves as an intrinsic part of the social grouping to which the caller belongs. Conversely, and as a comparison, it appears that those advisors who remain detached and distinctly removed from the caller are choosing specifically not to be a part of the social grouping as they do not associate with it. It may be that with other call types, for example, maternity entitlements, the approach taken may change depending on personal experiences, their experiences with other callers and their training.

These results provide significant clues that help address the central aim of this thesis. The discussion relating to the results and identity theory in chapter three infers that the role advisors play will in part be influenced by the way in which they choose to relate to the caller. It may also be influenced by how they synthesise the information given to either become a part of the discourse or to observe the discourse from a distance. Such a choice may enable an advisor to avoid any form of personalised engagement, and facilitate their ability to provide non-contextualised information.

The responses also reveal that some advisors suggested that certain callers did not realise that they were the subjects of workplace bullying. This perception by the advisors is insightful and resonates with existing research discussed in the Chapter three. Drawing upon Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003) and Williams (1997), this result suggests that the social self becomes so differentiated in terms of its relationships with her/his social networks that psychological drowning (Williams, 1997) can take place. Can such an abstract notion result in a void of understanding by the target of bullying? The results show that some callers cannot relate to workplace bullying even when it is explained to them; they still do not relate to the process in which they are immersed. Lewis (2004), in discussing shame and guilt in cases of workplace bullying, observes that it may take time for the subject of the bullying to reconcile what is happening to them. It is possible that the elapsed time could be because a bystander, work colleague, or friend may have to actually tell the subject of the bullying what is taking place (Lewis, 2001), rather than the subject being able to personally grasp the context of the situation.

Targets of workplace bullying seem to be unaware of what may be the heart of the problem, even though they can appreciate there is something in their working lives that have catalysed them to seek third party advice. Is it a realistic position to assume that someone calls the helpline, because he or she knows that there is something wrong in the relationships they have at work; or that the treatment they are receiving at work is inappropriate. Do they do all of this without actually being able to synthesise their personal situation? If this is the case, and the results suggest it may be, there are other factors that need to be considered in terms of the awareness of the situation that callers possess and what challenges the advisor faces.

It is evident from previous research into identity theories in relation to workplace bullying that abject treatments in the workplace, such as ostracism, can result in physiological deregulation, and malfunction resulting in responses from the body that can lead to various clinical conditions (Einarsen and Hellesoy, 1998). Mikkelsen (2001) has suggested that this may be as extreme as being unable to relate to oneself or one's social position due to the suppression of the social self. Such an outcome would appear to render the target of bullying a shell of themselves with reference only to their personal self, (Deschamps and Devos, 1998), which in effect prevents them from having a perspective or point of reference in the outside world. Does this result in an 'emotional state' during the explanation they provide to the advisor?

Several participants in the research referred to workplace bullying as something that is difficult to deal with because it is emotional. Could this mean that information shared by emotional callers makes contextualising workplace bullying a more onerous or difficult task for advisors to accomplish? Is the information provided by callers loaded with emotion or are the callers emotional? Smith (2006) asserts that emotional empathy, the vicarious sharing of emotion, enables people to be able to act altruistically because they are able to separate their emotion from the emotion they feel for others. This assertion has two important connotations for this thesis. First, in contextualising workplace bullying, the author contests that advisors can, where they so choose, display

developed emotional empathy; they are able to appreciate the caller's predicament, yet remain emotionally stable in order to offer a suitable intervention. Second, in the case of the caller, it is likely that she/he is unable to demonstrate emotional empathy because of the confusion that targets of workplace bullying experience. This could cloud their ability to make rational sense of their circumstances. Whilst Smith's insights into emotion and empathy are useful, they do not necessarily explain why emotional encounters between caller and advisor can be difficult.

It is apparent in these results that the difficulty that manifests itself from the advisors' perspective, is through the caller's distress and the problems that this presents in making sense of the issue. The persistent challenge for the advisor is to try to reach a rational point in the conversation whereupon the imparting of appropriate information is actually beneficial to the caller. The author suggests that the difficulty arises when the advisor may be unable to empathise and therefore engage with the caller or that the advisor finds difficulty in relating to the caller's reality. It seems possible that this situation exacerbates the 'wrestling' that the caller is likely to be experiencing in attempting to suppress the difficulties they may be facing and sustain an ability to portray a self respecting image following (Horrocks and Callahan, 2006). Whilst qualitative research cannot be generalised, and this thesis does not attempt to do so, there are indications in these results that could be taken to infer that those advisors who openly engage with callers regarding cases of workplace bullying do not necessarily find the emotional component of the interaction difficult. Whether the ability to engage is an objective skill or a more interpretive mental attitude towards the role cannot be determined here. There are however significantly important symbols and clues in the results that point towards a positive engagement being a requirement for advisors to be able to appropriately contextualise the alleged workplace bullying in order to compose a suitable portfolio of information on which the caller may act with some confidence.

Conclusions

Thus far, this discussion has outlined that Acas helpline advisors contextualise bullying as a complex web of many parts. First, the tension in attempting to

sustain an objective and impartial response has been explored, explaining the challenges faced in resisting the lure of subjectivity, which is contrary to the spirit of the policies that Acas espouse. Second, the challenge that presents itself to both caller and advisor in achieving a common interpretation of the discourse they are experiencing. If the contextualisation by the advisor is to be accurate, then the caller has to engage in the conversation. This engagement may help the advisor compose an appropriate intervention, however given the lack of homogeneity in workplace bullying and the potential masking of the situation by other issues, it seems this is a difficult circumstance in which the advisor must work. The lack of consistency and consensus between advisor and caller has been highlighted here to exacerbate the difficulties faced in attempting to contextualise the information being shared. During the course of the call, the notion of the way in which the caller and advisor identify with themselves and each other clearly plays a significant role in the way that the bullying episode is contextualised, interpreted and acted upon. Each party displays characteristics that permit the other either to further develop the interaction through seeking more information for example, or by taking a defensive posture that prevents the intervention from reaching a meaningful conclusion.

It seems evident that the combinations of the above facets alone probably reveal a complex set of stories that are both highly dynamic and complex. Additionally, however, there exists the dimensions of time, and those experiences outside of the Acas helpline environment that inevitably have an impact on the participants. In chapter one, for example, it was shown that the media can play a role in influencing our understanding of workplace bullying in the course of our working lives. Other influences include trades unions, family, friends, and social networks. It is interesting to note that these factors were not mentioned by those interviewed. Whilst this does not mean that such factors have not influenced the way in which participants contextualise bullying, (for example, these factors may not be perceived as explicit discourses), the breadth of consideration that helpline advisors consciously draw upon in their responses may suggest that a wider appreciation of the phenomenon may be beneficial. For example, in analysing the responses offered by participants, it is important to contrast the data with previous research, such as the way workplace bullying is defined (for example, Saunders,

2007). The existing body of workplace bullying research makes numerous references to the notion of organisational bullying, (for examples see Lewis and Rayner, 2003, Hoel and Beale, 2006 and Liefoghe and MacKenzie-Davy, 2001). There was not a single mention of organisational bullying in the responses received in this research. This is potentially an important finding, although it must be recognised that this research does constitute a small sample. Does the organisation explicitly feature during interventions provided by the Acas helpline to targets of workplace bullying? The advisor and the caller would appear to be in an exclusive relationship whereby the organisation remains a 'silent partner'. The term 'silent partner' has been specifically chosen. The organisation, in whatever guise, would usually be evident in the discourse, yet appears to remain unidentified. The absence of the organisation is probably to be expected given the personal circumstances the caller is likely to be experiencing. Nevertheless, does this situation possibly imply that the organisation is somehow escaping the finger of blame in cases of workplace bullying? Lewis and Rayner (2003) caution that managerial ethos and culture cannot simply be cited as reasons of workplace bullying, but do infer that the constructive and transparent convergence of many stakeholders in the workplace that could collectively be termed 'the organisation' is necessary to mitigate the risks of bullying in the workplace.

In chapter four it was asserted that much of the intervention research to date involved interventions at an organisational level, for example, training policies, and that little existed at the dyadic or individual level. Could it be the case that in such organisational intervention research into workplace bullying, the individual was as equally absent as the organisation is in this research? It seems possible that the understandable boundaries of research will mean that to encompass organisational intervention and dyadic intervention in the same study may be unfeasible. Does this mean that some form of co-operative way forward between researchers is necessary to somehow better understand the process of intervention? This supposition provides the workplace bullying research agenda with a potential dilemma as to how some form of convergence can be achieved.

Many of the participants commented that their experience of taking many calls provided them with what one referred to as a 'sixth sense'. It seems inappropriate

to suggest that the experiences gained by Acas helpline advisors in their daily duties contribute to a 'sixth sense'. Such an assertion lacks any scholarly credibility, although it may resonate with the notion of a lay person's 'knowledge and common sense theory', (Liefoghe and Olafsson, 1999). Can the workplace bullying academic debate benefit from further research that examines lay persons' theories and experiences of workplace bullying? The results in this thesis certainly suggest, as do Hoel and Beale (2006), that the post-positivist empirical research results that generally dominate the literature would benefit from a balanced inter-contextualised approach.

This chapter set out to present and discuss the results from the interviews and focus groups that help illustrate and understand how Acas helpline advisors contextualise workplace bullying. This has been achieved by examining the way in which advisors piece together information from various sources, drawing upon their personal experience that enables them to interpret clues offered by those contacting Acas that may mean the callers are the subjects of a possible bullying episode.

Having presented an explanation of the results and a critical discussion, this thesis will now pursue the final set of results from the data; the impact and outcome of the intervention as perceived by the helpline advisor. Following the way that advisors contextualise the information they are offered by callers, they are then expected to formulate a response that provides the caller with possible options to pursue the matter. This may include prescriptive process based advice, such as following a formalised grievance procedure. Alternatively, the advice may consist more of a descriptive approach that involves engaging people informally to discuss the situation. There are also options whereby the advisor may conclude that another agency may be best placed to provide a more appropriate intervention and may 'signpost' the caller in this direction.

Regardless of the specific advice offered in the course of the intervention, the advisor is likely to assess a number of factors. These include the effectiveness of the intervention they offer, the feasibility of success for the intervention and the ability or desire of the caller to follow through with the advice offered. What

processes do the advisors use to assess the outcome and impact of their advice and intervention? How do advisors determine and ultimately judge what information is most appropriate for the caller? What do advisors believe the caller is expecting and how do they attempt to ensure their advice dovetails with the caller's expectation? Chapter nine will deal with these questions as the thesis builds towards its aim of understanding the role Acas helpline advisors fulfil when intervening in cases of workplace bullying.

Chapter 9: The Impact and Outcome of Workplace Bullying Interventions: an Acas Helpline Advisor Perspective

Chapter Overview

Chapter eight explained the way in which Acas helpline advisors contextualise workplace bullying and built upon the foundations provided in Chapter seven that discussed the responses regarding the definitions of workplace bullying. The thesis, thus far, has therefore offered an explanation as to what helpline advisors define as workplace bullying and how they use their personal interpretations of the phenomenon to assess and contextualise potential workplace bullying cases when dealing with callers.

The principal aim of this thesis is to understand the role that Acas helpline advisors fulfil when intervening in cases of workplace bullying. Intrinsic to this aim is the intervention will be successful. This is because Acas claims that callers to the helpline will be able to act on the advice offered during the intervention and make constructive, positive steps towards addressing the particular situation they claim to be experiencing. This chapter will deal with the advisors' opinions about the success of the interventions that take place.

This chapter has a very specific focus. It will use the research evidence to explain how Acas helpline advisors assess the impacts and outcomes of the interventions they provide. Did the intervention represent what may be termed a 'positive impact' or a 'good outcome'? What constitutes such terms as 'positive impact'? This aim will be achieved by reflecting upon the responses to questions posed during interviews and focus groups about the advisors' appraisal of callers' expectations and their subsequent reflection of how the service provided by them as Acas helpline advisors met the callers' needs.

- How do advisors determine and ultimately judge what information is most appropriate for the caller?

- What processes do the advisors use to assess the outcome and impact of their advice and intervention?
- What do advisors believe the caller is expecting and how do they attempt to ensure their advice dovetails with the caller's expectation, depending whether they are an employee or an employer?
- Does the caller's identity as employee or employer make a discernable difference in the intervention process that ensues?
- What does the helpline advisor perceive the caller will do with the advice offered? Fundamentally, is it feasible to establish if the helpline is actually helping at all in alleged cases of workplace bullying?

The reason for posing these questions at this juncture is to assist the reader in considering the role that the Acas helpline advisor plays during an intervention episode. It may be reasonably argued that if a positive outcome for the caller does not ensue, then Acas may have fallen somewhat short of providing a meaningful and constructive intervention. This situation may not be one, however, that can be attributed to Acas, the organisation. Could it be that advisors are unable, or even unwilling, to provide a service that is commensurate with the needs of callers? Is it simply because of variability of advisor quality? Additionally, the results might explain the influence the intervention may have on helpline advisors themselves.

It is important to note that this chapter focuses solely on the interpretation offered by the helpline advisor and not from the caller. The Acas helpline advisors are considered important and relevant parties in the social construction of workplace bullying for those people who choose to call them. This is because the response the caller receives from the advisor will contribute to the discourse they are experiencing and possibly the outcome of the alleged bullying episode. Fundamentally, this chapter seeks to establish an understanding as to how the helpline advisor employs the implicit knowledge discussed in the previous two chapters to provide the caller with a service that is commensurate with their needs. This will be achieved by analysing the responses from questions posed during the interviews and focus groups.

The research findings focus on the impact and outcome that the caller is apparently seeking. The first cluster of results discusses those responses that focus on Acas being a provider of impartial, independent, and knowledgeable support.

PW *What expectations do you think people have when they call Acas' helpline?*

P1 *Normally when they ring, there's any range of things. You could get the people with the indignation you know, "They can't treat me like that can they?" "What can I do to sort this out?" You mainly get people that are just so distressed; it's almost like a counselling job, you really have to deal with the distress first to get through that ... So we're there to give them sort of guidance, advice, and options. We offer some support for people who probably don't know where to turn.*

This response is representative of numerous ones that follow. It appears that people contacting Acas via the telephone helpline are seeking support. The notion of providing support may not be considered an outcome or impact of the intervention offered by Acas. If the helpline advisor offers advice in a sympathetic manner, does this intervention constitute support? Is a sympathetic and informative telephone conversation sufficient to be a positive outcome or have a positive impact on the caller's circumstances? It is unfortunate that this thesis cannot answer these important questions as the research did not focus on the caller in any way, although it seems that this could be a topic for future research. To be clear, the purpose of this thesis is to understand the role fulfilled by Acas helpline, and as such, the results can only be presented from their perspectives. The following responses may provide some clues as to what the advisor community perceives is a positive impact or outcome for the caller.

PW *What do callers think Acas are there to do for them?*

P16 *I think they are willing to talk to Acas because they feel that we are a*

shoulder to cry on if you like. Quite often, they have all this pent up emotion and the amount of times that you know people break down in tears over the way that they have been treated. And I think it helps people just to get it off their chest in what they consider a safe environment and they know that Acas is not going to break any confidences. It's not what we do, it's just that they have someone to talk to I suppose, that we're there for them – there's not much you can do over a phone with these kinds of things.

Participant P16 suggests that because Acas are available and “there for them”, this provides some form of emotional crutch for callers to be able to share their situation confidentially. Again, one must examine if “being a shoulder to cry on” adequately describes the outcome or impact of the call in terms of being a positive outcome. It seems that helpline advisors suggest that such a response or offer of some form of support by them is commensurate with what a caller may expect. Is there more to what callers expect in terms of a supportive role? The next responses seem to suggest that this may be the case.

PW *What do callers want from you when you speak to them?*

P5 *I think sometimes that they like to talk it through. They just want a sounding board really and I think then they can feel better at the end of it because it's a release for them almost to go through their story. Usually, I find it's because they've got no one to speak to who understands what they're going through ... I think it's as if they want counselling or something else from us. All we can do is listen to their story and just point them in the right direction. That's all we can do.*

This participant brings the suggestion of counselling into the discussion as well as support. There is a suggestion in the discussion that the intervention offered by the helpline may be less than what a caller may need. This outcome presents a possible dilemma for the advisor. Is the intervention a positive one because support has been offered in the form of information or signposting to another

agency or is the intervention unsuccessful because additional or further intervention processes will be necessary to address the caller's situation? The following sets of responses seem to address this possible dilemma.

P11 *I think we've just got to be sympathetic ... with our job as well. You're mindful ... you know this is something ... you can't rush everyone. If someone's got a problem and they're upset you've got to listen and you've got to let them really tell you everything. You get used to it after a while and I think ... with bullying and harassment they need to be professionally supported. If it's linked to something else like ... disability, race, or sex discrimination, there are other things as well that it could link to. Most things like this are complicated and people need the chance to share the problem. We can't make it better, but in my experience, lots of people just feel more positive for having shared it.*

I think initially we're like being a sounding board ... They're getting all their problems out in one go, we're going to offer them some potential options that are open to them and hopefully they might feel better after, we never see the outcome of this. It's difficult to sort of try and gauge that way, it's too complicated to be able to deal with over the phone.

The above response would appear to suggest that when intervening in cases such as workplace bullying, the overall outcome may not be revealed until numerous interventions, possibly by multiple agencies have taken place. This is potentially an important finding in this results chapter. This particular result seems to infer that the role of the Acas helpline advisor is what could be described as the 'first port of call'. Is this the case however? It seems feasible that the caller may have pursued other avenues prior to calling Acas. If the caller, whether employer or employee, has investigated other options prior to calling Acas, does this then mean that Acas could fulfil a number of different roles in the bullying continuum? Equally, could the role the Acas advisor fulfils be described as being similar to the triage nurse in an accident and emergency unit at a hospital? This intervention

provided by the nurse is in essence an assessment of need that leads to prioritisation and appropriate direction within the hospital to ensure the necessary treatment is received. Is the Acas helpline advisor performing a triage intervention in cases of alleged bullying? This may be a plausible explanation based on the above comments. The objective signposting resonates with the analogy of the nurse identifying the best course of treatment or the person best placed to provide that treatment.

This support may be of little use in the overall process of treating the patient, but is it likely to be important at a human level where empathy and interest in the patient may make them feel less distressed about their situation? Whilst this may be the case, it also seems feasible that inappropriate signposting or a misunderstanding on the part of the advisor may result in an outcome that could exacerbate the caller's position. This thesis concludes that Acas' triage service may form a significant part of the role that advisors fulfil when intervening in cases of bullying, but warrants careful examination and provides possible avenues for future research. It is important at this juncture, however, not to discount the variability of the role that Acas may play depending on the courses of action pursued by the caller prior to contacting Acas. This is because the intervention may be early in the discourse or as a last resort following a lengthy period of chronic victimisation. It seems reasonable to suggest that the role the advisor plays could differ significantly in these two cases.

In order to pursue the triage service, one must critically question the notion of triage intervention provided by the Acas helpline and examine the level to which Acas adopts this style of intervention, assessing the role advisors play during their discussions with callers. The next cluster of results provides some insight into this role.

P13 *We're there just to give them the correct information ... to help them ... and to make sure we point them in the right direction ... we're just there to provide correct information to the caller.*

- P18 *I think we are seen as Mr Fix-It on occasions, but we're not ... Acas is consistent in its approach to what we do no matter who you are, so ... but it's difficult to try and pinpoint what the impact of our role actually is.*
- P20 *I think some of them want to be told that they're in the right, which of course we can't do because we have to be impartial ... I can't sympathise with the caller, I just have to tell them the facts, signpost them on and that's that.*
- P3 *I rarely ask anyone how they feel ... It goes against my role as a helpline advisor to a large degree. I'm not there to counsel them ... We can't go beyond fact based information, that's all we do.*
- P20 *I just give the workplace bullying advice lines. There are lots of different bullying advice lines ... I don't think there's anything more that Acas can do in its current role.*
- P21 *We're not a campaigning organisation so we're just explaining to people what their rights are.*

At face value, it could be reasonably argued that the above responses suggest a level of consistency in the theme that a triage service is being provided by the Acas helpline. Critically however, these results appear to implicitly dismiss the value of the subjective empathetic support that was previously identified in this chapter.

Recalling two of the questions posed at the start of this chapter, the author enquired as to what information the advisor may choose to impart and what the caller may do with the information to make the outcome and impact of the

intervention as successful as possible. The imparting of information may be a secondary function to providing a form of subjective, emotional support. Could it be that there is a role for the advisor to fulfil in engaging the caller at a human or emotional level before moving towards the objective assessment of providing rational information? Fundamentally, is there ambiguity over the role of the helpline? How is the role of the advisor specified? Does the reality of the role differ from the job description where Acas' founding principles are very evident? Such questions regarding the core role of the helpline advisor must not be underestimated in the context of this thesis. Impartiality and objectivity are cornerstones of Acas' reputation as being independent of both sides in a dispute. Should Acas choose to pursue their role where subjectivity would be an integral part of the processes it facilitates? With an increasing emphasis in the workplace on the individual and what may continue to be a decline in collectivism through such bodies as trades unions, it would seem possible that Acas may need to reconsider their position in these highly complex situations in an attempt to maintain their *raison d'être*. The respondent below appears to reveal a resonance with this suggestion.

PW *How do you make sure as best you can that the outcome of the intervention is a positive one for the caller?*

P10 *It's not my role to give an opinion or sympathise with them although sometimes that can be very difficult ... It's one of our golden rules, you don't give an opinion, and you don't even enter into the conversation. We should and often you really do want to, but you'd be in big trouble if you did. You give them the information they need and any advice but you don't discuss [it] with them ... You just say "You might need to go and think about legal advice. See I'm into my spiel now, it doesn't matter what you are feeling; you're going to get the same treatment ... You just try and offer them something with what is fairly limited information from your book. We need to do more, but our remit is quite limited and because of that, we have to accept that what we do is quite modest really.*

This respondent seems to be able to differentiate between the objective and subjective needs of the caller and his role in engaging with them. Possibly, more importantly, he recognises the shortcoming that may be apparent in providing information alone without a form of emotional engagement. The distinct differences that appear to be apparent in the forms of support provided via the Acas helpline could suggest that the role fulfilled by advisors has two components. First, that they ensure accurate and appropriate information is conveyed. Second is to ensure that a level of empathy is established possibly in order to facilitate a more effective form of information transfer.

Is it the case that providing succinct, objective, factual based information to people who are seeking advice in regard of workplace bullying constitutes an appropriate reactive intervention? This thesis cannot address this question as it falls outside of the boundaries set in Chapter one. The question does, however, prompt the researcher to investigate further in search of other scenarios that may be apparent in the outcomes that callers may be seeking. Is Acas' impact in the intervention episode adequate when considering the caller's needs and wants? The following sets of results discuss the other scenarios that participants revealed in the focus groups and interviews. The next response suggests that where the provisions of the Employment Law Act may be insufficient, employees may wish to pursue the situation through what appears to be some form of revenge.

PW *You seem to be suggesting that they're looking for revenge ... to punish their employer, or punish the bully?*

P17 *Yeah, it's a strong word punishment, but I guess it is quite appropriate. You want something done, perhaps someone who has barely been there less than a few days and they are being treated with atrocious behaviour or something and they've asked about it and they've been told to go forth and multiply. They call us and there's nothing they can do ... All we can do is to advise if you take it further we can explain to you how you can. If you can't we can explain well you can't and in those situations it's, "Well where do I go". "Well*

your MP maybe. How useful is that?"

The participant suggests that the caller is seeking a form of justice in response to their treatment at work. This thesis is unable to address further the reasoning for the desire for justice although it is suggested that this is potential area for future research. The question that is relevant to this thesis is what role does the advisor fulfil in such scenarios as the one described above? It may be the case that the caller wants the bullying to stop and sees the course of action described as an appropriate one in the circumstances. It may be that the bullying has stopped, but this is insufficient in the target's opinion. It is also important to reflect on whether the target wishes to seek retribution from the employer or the bully personally. Would any of these factors influence the role the advisor plays? How does Acas provide a service that constitutes an effective intervention in such circumstances as the one described above? The following results could be argued to be centred on the caller wishing to act and seek a form of redress against the perpetrator(s).

P2 *They want ... justice as they call it; it's just to speak to someone who can sort of say to them "well if you want to tackle it, you can. If you want to walk away from it and just don't want to be in that situation, you can do that too". Most people I think though ... want to address it, I suppose because, well it's wrong.*

These responses also seem to suggest the notion of triage as an appropriate outcome to the intervention. This respondent is clear in suggesting that people being bullied may be keen to take decisive action. This thesis posits that simply by providing another agency's details may be falling significantly short of what the caller needs to be able to address the situation. It seems feasible that a form of encouragement to resolve the situation and restore a healthy working environment may be an appropriate response in addition to the provision of objective information. The response below could be supportive of this assertion.

PW *What are they expecting from you? What do they want? What do they*

want you to do?

- P4 *If you feel you're the one being bullied, you want it to stop, you want fairness and justice, you want some resolution ... Most people in this state want to do something and giving them sympathy isn't going to help. They need the tools to act on the problem and the confidence to do it. They need to act quickly before things get out of hand and I think there has to be willingness on both parties and a recognition that something has to change; they can't carry on in the way that they're going.*

The respondent here conveys a sense of urgency about responding to the caller in order to provide a potential resolution. She/he appears to have expanded the boundaries of the helpline advisor's core responsibilities to be endorsing a means of facilitating a solution rather than providing information. The following responses follow a similar theme, but with an important difference. The caller wants to act on the situation they face, (they want more than the support discussed previously), however the caller does not want to be the person who takes the action. It is apparent that the caller expects that their call to the helpline will result in Acas actually intervening themselves on the caller's behalf.

- PW *When you take that call, what do you think that caller's expecting you to offer them?*

- P4 *A miracle. They want us to make everything right. They think we're going to go there and sort them ... We're not the employment police, but that's what these callers want.*

- P10 *The expectation is that we're going to come in and resolve it and you know be like superman and sort it all out.*

- P20 *... They want us to react; they want us to do something. They think we are an authoritative body that can come and sort the problem out.*

- P10 *... They're expecting us to actually intervene and sort the employer out*

for them

- P2 *We can't give anywhere near what they want us to ...*
- P4 *They think we can go, go along to their workplace ... put it right or represent them but we can't; we can sort of look at their situation, discuss it through with them. I think we're like counsellors.*
- P13 *I think that the difference between what they expect and what we can actually advise is vast. They expect us to be able to fix it and we're telling them that really they've got to fix it themselves ...*
- P17 *People ... do believe that we're the employment police there to sort things out. A lot of people think of us as a union to a certain extent. You can't join us and we're not going to come round and make things better just like that.*
- P19 *They think we're going to attend disciplinary and grievance meetings with them and all sorts of things.*
- P5 *They think that we can give them free legal advice as well ... and to sort everything out for them ... but we're quite limited as to what we can do.*
- P3 *Some people think that we're going to go in and sort the company out ... A lot of people perceive Acas as being the person that will go and sort problems out for them.*

The assumption of invasive intervention by Acas in cases of workplace bullying was a common comment from many respondents. This may provide some clues as to the role that Acas (or other agencies) may need to fulfil where workplace bullying is alleged. It may be that a balance has to be found where the target of the bullying is not further exposed to the behaviours in order to take action against the perpetrator, but equally, the target may have to be the person who pursues the

case. In such circumstances, it would seem that Acas needs to be able to provide closer, more sophisticated support.

The above results have concentrated on the impact and outcome from calls with employees. The results also revealed that employers calling Acas for support have differing expectations in what they may require from Acas.

PW *What about when the employer calls about workplace bullying?*

P9 *The calls that we get from employers are normally from the smaller companies ... The smaller companies leave things to the last minute and then they're not sure and they ring us up.*

P11 *If it's ... a small company, they wouldn't have procedures in place. They wouldn't have a grievance procedure so they don't know what they should do when they get employee complaints. They don't have a company handbook that they can have a look at and know what steps to follow.*

P1 *If you get an employer ringing, it could be that he's had two employees come to grief. It's got too much and the employer doesn't know what to do ... usually they just want a quick fix, so that's a mediation job for us where we can go in and be impartial.*

Two themes are apparent in these results. First, the employer tends to be a smaller company, possibly without specialist HR functions. The comments suggest that matters may be protracted before the employer calls requiring a significantly more acute intervention than may have been appropriate if proactive steps had been taken during more peaceful times. Using the nursing analogy once again, the need that may be apparent need here could be akin to first aid for the company. It may well be that the advisor has tools at her/his disposal to address the prevailing situation and 'stem the flow'. Is it possible that this intervention

could be successful? In the second theme, the intervention probably needs to be underpinned with other Acas services which stretch significantly beyond the 'first aid' that can be offered by the helpline. Such interventions may include training or mediation. In a highly competitive operating environment experienced by many small companies, it seems possible that the employer will overlook this investment with significant consequences that can only be surmised.

Having considered the content of the calls, the nature and disposition of the caller, it is also appropriate to consider the impact and outcome of the call on the advisors themselves. The reason for this examination is that the role the advisor plays during interventions is likely to be shaped by their social experiences. This assumption is core to the philosophical foundations of this thesis that we inhabit a socially constructed world where experiences contribute to shaping the way people interpret their surroundings. It seems feasible that the experiences gained during the advisor's working day, along with many other impacts in their wider life, will shape the role they play. Does a long, emotional call with a distressed person leave an impression on the advisor that may negatively affect them or their families? Does the content of one call affect their approach with another? Despite procedures regarding confidentiality, do advisors discuss the content of calls with one another? Is it possible that advisors share stories with friends, families and social networks in a way that may help them, but may also contribute to the construction advisors create? The following results may offer an insight into the way in which calls, some specifically regarding workplace bullying, may have an affect on Acas helpline advisors.

P2 *You can get someone calling and saying, "I've got cancer and I've been disciplined because I've had a lot of time off on the sick," ... you really feel for them. You can give your support and you can sympathise and sometimes it's very sad, and yes, I suppose you do get affected by it, but you just get on with it, its no good trying to understand every upset person, you'd spend your entire day talking to everyone in the office. I'm used to it and you make your own mind up on it.*

Participant P2 suggests that he internalises the calls that may cause him to feel upset in some way. He also implies that time may condition him in some way to deal with difficult calls with less impact to him as a person.

PW *Do the calls that are emotionally challenging affect the way you may deal with future callers?*

P1 *When you come off the phone you might comment or whatever. You might need a breather to compose yourself ... if it's been a particularly distressing call, but that's where the team support each other, they'll talk about a call afterwards. It helps to get someone else's view sometimes, especially if you haven't dealt with that kind of problem before. I suppose bullying is a good example actually. If somebody feels they need to come off maybe for a few minutes to sort of gather their thoughts before they carry on that's, that's fine. It's difficult to define it because I wouldn't say you become hardened to it but it is something that you do sort of take it in your stride more as you become more experienced. When you first train, you can get quite emotionally involved, but you experience a lot here and it helps us provide a better service as you've probably heard it all before sometime.*

The previous participants seem to take a different view in that they share their experiences of emotionally difficult calls. There is also clear inference that calls to help each other build a body of experience, which is seen as beneficial. It is unclear from these results how the experiences advisors gather in their working lives shape the way in which they mature as helpline advisors. Does this suggest that there is little or no contribution to the role they play as their experience develops? What importance should be related to greater or lesser experience? These are important questions for the author as it is related to the central aim of this thesis. In asking what role helpline advisors fulfil, it is appropriate to enquire what helps to shape the role they fulfil. The results suggest that many facets contribute to the role played, however the results do not offer an insight in the

way an advisor's personal experiences augment or diminish their role. Two particular factors in the results may provide clues as to the way in which the advisor continually evolves the role he/she plays when dealing with callers, especially regarding alleged workplace bullying.

First, responses are presented that reveal what advisors believe may happen after the intervention. What value do these results offer this thesis? It is possible that advisors ask themselves what the outcome of the caller's situation may be to help shape how to deal with future calls.

PW *Do you think about what happens after the call finishes?*

P8 *Yes, but it's very difficult to say because we don't hear the results. You'll sometimes get people ringing back because they want a different answer to the one that the first person gave them or they just don't understand what they've been told. I suppose it makes you think if you are giving the best advice so they can do something with it ... I suppose you hope that the information you give them is enough for them to act on ... Sometimes you need to think how you package the information just based on previous experience or they'll just ring up again.*

Here, participant P8 suggests that it is difficult to be specific about the post-intervention course of events. It is important to note that the advisor comments on the quality of the advice offered and how the advice is packaged in order for the caller to act on it, rather than just receive it. This observation is argued to be an important point in the role the advisor fulfils. The advisor's role may evolve as they extend the boundary of their personal construction of the intervention. It may be that with little experience, the advisor is unable to adequately describe to themselves the ways the information offered could be tailored to ensure it is of utmost use to the caller. However, as their experience develops, the advisor's experiences may enable them to cultivate their role which may subsequently enhance the contribution they make.

PW *What do you think happens to the people after they've called? What do you think, what do they do?*

P14 *I'd like to think they would be doing something rather than just listening and walking away. Sometimes I feel that if they've used us as a sounding board, they don't listen to what we tell them ... If they are aware of what they're then able to do because of what we've said, I like to think it would empower them to do something. So, trying to give them some sort of areas to empower themselves and hopefully they will take some sort of action but there's no guarantee what that would be. The problem is of course that some things we might be suggesting are things they just can't do and that's where we fall down. That's the worst outcome because you've reinforced their helplessness.*

The above participant is clear in setting out how she endeavours to empower the caller to be able to act. This shows how the advisor has shaped her role possibly based on what she holds as personal values. It is feasible that the advisor's role is likely to be influenced by the way in which they perceive what the caller's next steps could be, in this case empowered to act against a bully. The narrative suggests that the advisor wants to wholly engage the caller, gain the caller's undivided attention, and only then explain what the caller can do to address the situation. This approach could be likened to some form of coaching. The advisor remains impartial, but is effectively on the side of the caller, wanting to be able to provide some toolset that enables a response to stop the bullying. Is this explanation only an elaboration of previous results offered? The advisor has conveyed information appropriate in response to the caller's enquiry on which the caller may choose to act. It is argued, however, that by examining the way that information is conveyed, the role that the advisor fulfils may be better understood. In this case, it is clear that the advisor wants to engage, wants to empower, and wants to help. The advisor is providing the equipment (the objective information), the instructions on how to assemble it (the context of its usefulness), and an explanation of how to use it (the empowerment of the caller). Such a representation of the advisor's role seems to take the role towards what may be a

utopian ideal based on the limitations of a free of charge helpline facility. It seems clear from the findings in this chapter that the notion of defining success for the helpline advisor is a complex challenge. How can Acas achieve these complex aims when it appears to be bound by policies that could constrain it? Having concluded the presentation of findings, this chapter will now turn to discuss the results, reflecting on the range of literatures available to address this dilemma.

Discussion

The discussion section of this chapter will pursue a different course to those in Chapters five and six. This is intentional. Chapters five and six presented results that had a relatively direct relationship with existing research and commentary in the workplace bullying field. This chapter's results and responses produce a different situation from which to enter a discussion. This is because the subject matter of the chapter progresses this thesis into what may be termed 'new territories'. The workplace bullying research agenda has yet to explore comprehensively individualised third party interventions. Consequently, there are significant limitations in comparing and contrasting these results with previous workplace bullying research.

What challenges does a paucity of workplace bullying literature present this thesis at this juncture? The immediate and obvious limitation is the lack of existing research from which to position these results. Equally, however, this limitation provides an opportunity to draw upon other bodies of literature and possibly catalyse new avenues of research within the workplace bullying agenda. Second, the relative absence of existing specialist bullying literature helps introduce this thesis' significant contribution to knowledge through identifying and understanding the key themes that emerge from the responses.

The responses in this chapter infer that in numerous different ways, the outcome and impact of the Acas helpline provides a reactive service that supports and signposts callers who make contact because of alleged workplace bullying. The ways in which the Acas helpline offers support appears to manifest itself in different ways. There is evident variability in both the approach taken by the

advisor and the needs of the caller that means a prescriptive approach to the process of the intervention is possibly an inappropriate method. Nevertheless, Acas seemingly attempt to structure boundaries around the service they offer which inevitably does result in a level of prescription as to what can and cannot be addressed via the helpline service. Could it be that Acas is presenting itself with a dichotomy whereby its aspirations and aims with the helpline service are unlikely to be met if it is set within a rigid boundary? In order to address this question, it may help to examine telephone helpline intervention in a broader context to consider more holistically what service they perceive they are actually providing.

Reactive telephone intervention appears to have received some attention from the academic community over the past 30 years (for examples, see Parker et al 2002; Zhu et al 1996 and Lando et al 1992). With the majority of the subject matter covering such topics as smoking cessation and follow up interventions in clinical or medical care, the direct usefulness to this thesis is limited. Similarly, the topic of helplines appears also to have received negligible attention from the academic community. Why is this relevant to the ensuing discussion in this chapter? First, this discussion needs to juxtapose the results in this chapter with other research. The apparent lack of relevant research with which to do this suggests a need for this thesis to look wider in an effort to interpret and convey an understanding of the role fulfilled by the Acas helpline. Second, in broadening the scopes of reference, this discussion provides a catalyst and opportunity to make a further significant contribution to knowledge.

In order to achieve a satisfactory impact or outcome to the intervention, it appears that the advisor has to fulfil two basic functions. First, it is evident that there is a need for advisors to listen to what the caller is saying. There is research to show that information may be provided via a self serve telephone based service consisting of libraries of pre-recorded information bulletins (see Wilkinson et al 1978). One should not discount, therefore, the need and indeed the ability of the advisor to be able to listen to the caller. Kezborn (2002 p.11) asserts that:

“Active listening is a strategy that involves reviewing the central themes or content of the message, reflecting on what has been said, and assuring one understands through paraphrasing and testing one’s assumptions”.

The responses in this research suggest that inconsistency may exist where some advisors are willing to engage in active listening, whilst others give the impression that this may not be a characteristic of their working practices.

Second, the advisor needs to be able to impart information in a way that may be consumed by the caller and put to productive use. The responses suggest that this element of the interaction between advisor and caller may be mixed. For example, some advisors appear to engage in a manner that maximises the opportunity for them to facilitate a successful outcome, for example:

“So we’re there to give them sort of guidance, advice, and options. We offer some support for people who probably don’t know where to turn”.

“If someone’s got a problem and they’re upset you’ve got to listen and you’ve got to let them really tell you everything”.

“It’s not what we do, it’s just that they have someone to talk to I suppose, that we’re there for them”.

“Most things like this are complicated and people need the chance to share the problem. We can’t make it better, but in my experience, lots of people just feel more positive for having shared it”.

Other advisors however, appear to approach the intervention in a manner that may be described as dismissive.

“I can’t sympathise with the caller, I just have to tell them the facts, signpost them on and that’s that”.

“I rarely ask anyone how they feel ... It goes against my role as a helpline advisor to a large degree. I’m not there to counsel them ... We can’t go beyond fact based information, that’s all we do”.

“I just give the workplace bullying advice lines”.

“We’re not a campaigning organisation so we’re just explaining to people what their rights are”.

In comparing the two types of responses above, it seems reasonable to assume that to achieve a successful outcome to the intervention, a level of 'active listening' is required, coupled with an informed approach to offering information or guidance based on the caller's situation and prevailing needs.

The sharing of information may be categorised into two broad, but distinct types. First, a transactional provision of information, possibly similar to that associated with the second set of quotes from the responses above, and second, an interactive type of information provision, whereby the Acas advisor is required to explore the caller's situation before responding. Is it necessary to probe and question, as well as listen, to achieve an optimal intervention impact? By entering into such a dialogue to explore the caller's personal circumstances, does this change the role of the Acas helpline from promoting harmonious working environments to one of counselling? Telephone counselling has been the subject of significant research over the past 30 years and has been shown to be a successful means of providing counselling services (for example see Reese et al, 2006), with convenience, accessibility and control being the cited factors that generated the positive levels of satisfaction from callers (Reese et al, 2006).

Telephone helplines for counselling have existed since the 1950s (Kleespies and Blackburn, 1998) including in such extreme areas as suicide (for example, Rhee, 2005) covering behavioural (Bischoff, 2004), and cognitive therapy (Reese et al, 2006). Therefore, whilst workplace bullying has been labelled as a severe social stressor (Zapf, 1999), a source of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), (Tehrani, 2004 and Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996), and a source of severe impact to the health of victims (Einarsen and Raknes, 1997), should Acas wish to enter the field of counselling with their helpline service, it would appear to be a feasible venture.

Could it be that the label counselling is simply a discomfort to Acas? The 'equivalence of outcome' (Bunce and Stephenson 2000) could mean that the desired result for the caller is achieved regardless of the label attached, although dependent on the approach taken by the advisor. By taking an over cautious stance towards the notion of counselling, it may be that Acas are devaluing the service that the helpline provides. If the notion of counselling were accepted as

an inherent part of the helpline service, would this facilitate an intervention where the outcomes and impacts were commensurate with the caller's needs and wants? There appears to be little specific evidence in the literature that bounds employee counselling interventions to a typical timeframe or that provides a chronology that is representative of the time taken to affect a useful intervention. It becomes evident however that the techniques, strategies, and processes employed extend significantly beyond a single telephone call with an Acas advisor who, whilst experienced, will more than likely not be a trained clinician.

For those advisors who choose to engage in their analysis of the situation described by callers, could it be argued that they are self selecting to journey along the advice-to-counsellor continuum? Counselling in the psycho-social context is considered a generic term that encompasses several processes of interviewing, testing, guiding, and advising, designed to help individuals solve problems and plan for the future (Reber and Reber, 2001), which would appear to fit with the approach taken by some advisors based on the responses in this research. In the UK there appears to be no formal requirement for academic qualifications to become a counsellor (HYPERTEXT REF. 4) beyond the UK NVQ III level, (equivalent to UK 'A' level secondary education). Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that an Acas helpline advisor could be deemed a counsellor depending upon the approach they adopted. This assertion may be of significant concern to Acas. Does Acas wish to be perceived as a counselling service? If it does not, and there appears to be no evidence to the contrary, then it is possible that specific action should be taken by Acas policy makers to prevent the helpline becoming such a service. It may be however, that setting boundaries that in effect attempt to limit the conversation an advisor has could have limited benefits to both Acas and the caller.

How well do the above comments address the aims of this discussion? This thesis suggests that only a small part of the discussion required has been satisfied thus far. The responses in this chapter provide insight into the role of the Acas helpline advisor that have yet to be addressed. Whilst it may have been established that the service provided by the Acas helpline in cases of alleged workplace bullying may be best served by 'active listening' and adopting an

approach broadly commensurate with counselling practices, there appears to be a shortcoming in understanding *how* a positive impact and outcome may be achieved as perceived by the helpline advisor.

How can the helpline advisor use the information offered to provide information, counsel, signpost, support or direct the caller? The aim of this thesis is to understand the role that Acas helpline advisors fulfil when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying. Inherent in this aim is a desire to be able to understand how fulfilling the role can be maximised to make as positive a contribution as is possible to the caller. As this is a DBA, there is a requirement to make a significant contribution to practice as well as knowledge. Based on these last statements, it is argued that the final discussion that follows is not only relevant to this chapter, but is fundamentally central to the aims of the overall thesis. In order to comprehend the role of the advisor more thoroughly and assess potential options for the future, it is necessary to journey beyond the literatures explored thus far to establish a more detailed and nuanced understanding.

The final chapter will provide insight from other literatures which may help distil and develop the understanding of the role fulfilled by Acas helpline advisors. This will be achieved by reflecting on the macro environment within which Acas operates, offering a discussion that reflects on the responses and results illustrated in chapters five, six and seven and providing conclusions that both demonstrate the contribution this thesis makes to not only existing knowledge, but also to practice.

Chapter 10: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The discussion from the last chapter suggested that the advisors' perceptions on the impact and outcome of their work may have a fundamental bearing on this thesis as a whole. This is because the aim of the thesis is to understand the role fulfilled by Acas helpline advisors when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying. It has been argued that to understand the role they fulfil, one must attempt to understand what the outcome of that role may be.

Chapter ten resumes this discussion, evolving it further to consider more holistically the role of the Acas advisor. This final chapter will achieve this aim by weaving together the many threads that have emerged in order to understand the role that Acas helpline advisors play when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying. Alongside this discussion, the chapter will make sense of the role of the Acas helpline by considering its position as part of a Government funded, independent and impartial organisation, engaged by industry to help create and maintain harmonious workplaces.

Additionally, as a DBA, this thesis will point towards some possible practical options for the Acas helpline to consider as its role evolves moving into the second decade of the millennia with significant additional Government financial investment totalling some £30M. By coupling the discussion that expounds the Acas helpline role and the suggestion of models which may develop the value of the role played, the contribution to knowledge and possible avenues for future research will clearly be demonstrated.

Results Discussion

The results of the interviews and focus groups present a complex set of responses which at the highest level provide an indication of the challenges and difficulties that Acas face in offering a free of charge telephone helpline service. It appears clear that if the Acas helpline is to be successful in combating workplace bullying to 'improve organisations and working life' (Hypertext Ref. 5), then they face a

significant challenge. Considering the results of this thesis, it appears evident that the ability of the Acas helpline advisor to define bullying is at best questionable. This is not to criticise the helpline advisor, as there are similar parallels amongst academics. The ambiguity of the meaning of workplace bullying discussed in Chapter 2 resonates with this thesis; the multiple interpretations and constructs of bullying create a montage of meaning that can be interpreted in many ways.

Further, the Dignity at Work Action Pack, (Unite and BERR - The Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, 2008) also conclude that little consensus exists amongst employees about the meaning of workplace bullying. The difference between academe, the Government and trades unions, and the Acas helpline is that the helpline is faced with the reality of workplace bullying where practical advice and solutions cannot be the subject of lengthy theoretical debate.

Paradoxically however, if it were assumed that the Acas helpline had a definition for workplace bullying that was universally accepted, practical and succinct, would this actually help them in their endeavours? This thesis argues that a definition, whilst useful from a legal perspective to pursue a claim in the Employment Tribunal arena for example, would have little benefit to the Acas helpline advisor. The responses in this thesis suggest that Acas advisors believe workplace bullying occurs when people perceive they have experienced the phenomenon. The advisor accepts the caller's assessment of the situation described and does not have the mandate to challenge it or certainly disagree with it. It is questionable whether the Acas advisor should even discuss or explore the caller's opinion. Therefore, the role fulfilled by the Acas advisor probably has to operate outside the comfort and boundary of a definition in the case of workplace bullying, which inevitably makes more difficult the role of the advisor in providing a positive intervention. Conversely, it is argued here that given the complexity and subjectivity inherent in workplace bullying, a definition may become a 'crutch' on which advisors could lean. This may mean that the Acas helpline would inadvertently judge situations that they perceived fit the definition.

Is it possible that this approach could result in inflaming or exacerbating what the situation in which the caller finds herself/himself? The responses in chapter six

suggest that some Acas advisors contextualise the information they receive from callers in an attempt to explore and understand the situation. It seems that this enables them to respond to the caller based on case specific interpretation and contextualisation. Such responses require skills and attitudes from the Acas advisor that goes well beyond what would be an objective assessment to determine if certain definitional criteria have been met, which in turn determines the advisor's course of action. Further, Acas' preventative based approach to workplace relations aims to reduce claims made at the Employment Tribunals, which is itself a Government agenda. Could it be the case that a definition may well increase the numbers of cases brought, rather than assist Acas (and other agencies) in reducing them? This dilemma presents a potential challenge for Acas that would potentially necessitate change in the way in which they operate.

It should not be forgotten that Acas' current guise first appeared in the 1970s. Since that time, much of Acas' work has been dominated by legal reform such as the Race Relations Act (1976), the Sex Discrimination Act (1982) and the Equal Pay Act (1986). Acas' *raison d'être* on the employee relations circuit has historically been to work with such legal frameworks as the examples above. This type of work has clear boundaries and requirements where government, employers, employees and representative organisations all have roles that are clearly identifiable. Workplace bullying does not fit this schema and as a result, it is understandable that Acas is having some difficulty in accommodating it within its operating model.

It is clear that a balance must be achieved between the role of the helpline advisor and the objective of reducing the number of claims reaching Employment Tribunals, which has seen a sustained increase since 1990 (Hooker et al, 2007 and Meadows, 2007). Having taken over 908,000 calls in the fiscal year 2005/06 (Hooker et al, 2007), there is an opportunity for the Acas helpline to have a significant impact on the outcomes of many employment issues. The balance between strict prescription adhering to impartiality and independence versus an approach that embraces the need to understand and contextualise is important, especially with governmental pressure to reduce employment tribunal claims. Could Acas develop its approach whereby its impact is even greater whilst also

accommodating changing demands by its primary stakeholder, the UK Government? Hooker et al (2007) claims that the Acas helpline has a net economic impact of £353.6M with a cost benefit ratio of 53:1, much of which is directly or indirectly associated with the avoidance of Employment Tribunal claims, emphasising the importance Acas places on this measure.

It has been explained that due to Acas' policies and the ambiguities inherent in workplace bullying it is impractical to make detailed analyses of the reasons people call the helpline. Acas could spend significant time and effort trying to make sense of call reasons. One must challenge the value of this effort compared to taking a bold approach that is predicated on driving change in the net economic impact results and the success of reducing claims at the employment tribunals? This question leads the discussion first to understanding the drivers and stakeholders that influence the role Acas fulfils today and second, possibly also in the future.

At the time of concluding this thesis in November 2008, the UK economy is in a recession. With increasing inflation and subsiding consumer confidence coupled with a lack of industry confidence in trading conditions, public sector funding is under ever more tight scrutiny. Additionally, the industrial relations landscape in the first half of 2008 has experienced increased tension and unrest with numerous strikes and more forecast before the end of the year. The Government's decision, therefore, to provide Acas with additional funding of £30M illustrates the relevance that it places on the role that Acas fulfils. Moreover, at the Unite trade union conference in London, July 2008, Ed Sweeney, the Chair of Acas announced that the Acas budget increase would mainly be targeted at the helpline. The political and governmental stakeholder community appears to be making a clear statement to industry and to Acas that it places significant importance on the work of the Acas helpline. As the helpline receives this additional investment, what evidence or clues may provide Sweeney and the Acas management team with direction as to where this funding may be spent? Such an investment could provide a material change in the capacity of the helpline by employing many more advisors. Would simply creating more capacity achieve the aims Acas espouses? This thesis strongly argues that the approach the helpline adopts may have to

change in order to maximise the benefit of the additional investment. To provide more capacity that continues with the same service is possibly going to be limited to answering more calls faster, but little else. The Government, trades unions, and industry professional bodies appear to have a convergent agenda that offers some insight as to the role Acas may fulfil. Published research and policy announcements from numerous organisations are providing signposting from which Acas may benefit as it considers the ways in which it must evolve to meet the changing needs from its customers and expectations from its stakeholders.

Since February 2007, three reports of relevance and importance to Acas and this thesis have been produced. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, (CIPD) survey report titled *Managing Conflict at Work*, (CIPD, 2007) was the first of its type undertaken by the CIPD since the introduction of the UK Statutory Dispute Resolution Procedures came into force in October 2004, implemented under the Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Resolution Regulations 2004). The findings of the survey would appear to have ramifications for the role that the Acas helpline may fulfil in the future. Despite the best intentions of the these procedures, the CIPD survey revealed that over 80% of respondents stated that they had had no positive impact or in fact had a negative impact on claims made to the Employment Tribunal. Of those who responded, 28% stated they were receiving more grievances than before. Companies that were employing such training as mediation saw no benefit in reduced grievances. Is this a surprising conclusion? There is evidence in the workplace bullying research, (see Einarsen, 2003 for example) that following the implementation of policies and training, the awareness appears to result in an increase of grievances about workplace bullying.

The CIPD survey also revealed that across all sectors canvassed, workplace bullying was ranked fifth in terms of likelihood to escalate to an Employment Tribunal claim, with the four above it, (behaviour/conduct, sex, race and disability discrimination) all able to be linked relatively easily to workplace bullying. Additionally, since the introduction of the Statutory Dispute Resolution Procedures an increase of 36% of employers had turned to Acas for advice. A recent examination of Acas data by Murdoch (2008) reveals that increasingly the issues that Acas are dealing with relate to individual disputes, (such as sexual

orientation discrimination, religious belief issues, and race discrimination). This is an important observation in the context of this thesis and the role of the Acas helpline. Whilst Acas' history is steeped in the major industrial disputes of the 1970s and 1980s, the collective nature of these conflicts, with the decline in trades union membership, has in part been largely replaced by disputes that affect individuals, which whilst less visible than major strike action for example, have an equally significant impact on those affected, such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), (Tehrani, 2004). The Acas helpline may be ideally positioned to advise individuals and may be an under utilised asset in the Acas stable.

Recalling Acas' published aim of "Improving organisational life through better employment relations", it seems that the Statutory Dispute Resolution Procedures may well have made this aspiration significantly more difficult to achieve as the provision this law appears to be driving dispute processes whilst not necessarily improving resolution. It does, however, provide clear signposting that the developments in employment law in the UK point towards Acas needing to be able to be better informed and effective in the interventions they provide in order to reduce the number of cases reaching the Employment Tribunal. Westhues (2008) takes a critical view, not constrained to the UK, where, drawing on Theodore Dalrymple, he suggests that:

"We live in a political culture in which a sense of grievance stands as its own justification: you are wronged if you think you are".

Westhues (2008) adds that he cannot see that bullying can be measured by a checklist of negative acts and suggests more bullying is accompanied by more sensitivity, citing younger workers who come from the "every kid on the soccer team gets a trophy" generation. Westhues' perspective appears to further complicate the role that the Acas helpline has to fulfil in cases of alleged workplace bullying. Where litigation and compensation are concepts which are increasingly pervading society, for example through consumer programs and personal injury claim advertising on television, are there indicators to show responses are being formulated to redress the balance to seek resolutions that are more effective than today? In December 2006, the Government commissioned

Michael Gibbons, (Gibbons, 2007) to review the options for simplifying and improving all aspects of employment dispute resolution.

The Better Dispute Resolution Report (Gibbons, 2007) builds on the findings of the CIPD survey by suggesting that early resolution and alternatives to Employment Tribunals are essential to improve the ways in which workplace disputes are resolved. Gibbons (2007) made numerous recommendations that are pertinent to the Acas helpline and this thesis. First, he advocates early resolution, in the workplace, without recourse to formalised processes. Referring to Acas, he suggests that their mediation service should be employed prior to any claim being made to the Employment Tribunal. In discussing the telephone helpline, he notes that it produces a statutory code of practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures. Is it possible that the Acas helpline is negatively contributing towards both its parent organisations fundamental aims and the recommendations made by Gibbons? The results showed that the Acas helpline advisors are likely to offer callers information that is consistent with taking a formalised approach. There was no indication in the results that suggested Gibbons' recommendations formed part of the response that Acas provides to callers. Glasl's conflict escalation model (1994) cited in Einarsen et al (2003) is one example in the established literature that neglects the opportunities early dispute resolution may offer and thus mitigate the escalation to which Glasl refers. It seems feasible that by offering information that promotes the formalised process, the Acas helpline may actually be inflaming situations and signposting people towards a resolution path that Acas is trying to prevent and that Gibbons cites as ineffective in many cases. This insight from Gibbons, however, again offers some inkling into what role the Acas helpline may fulfil based on his recommendations towards early informal resolution in the workplace.

Both the CIPD survey report (2007) and The Better Dispute Resolution report, (Gibbons, 2007) paint numerous common themes that illustrate what challenges face industry today in dealing with disputes and conflicts, including workplace bullying. They do not, however, offer informed views on how these conflicts may be dealt with, and neither do they provide an indication of what role the Acas helpline may fulfil. For this information, this thesis turns towards the Dignity at

Work Action Pack (2008) published by the UK Government and Unite, (a large UK trade union, with over two million members in the public and private sectors). In her introduction, Baroness Gibson states that the publication aims to provide information, advice, and solutions to workplace bullying. Unite comment that, “There is no legal right to dignity at work in the UK and therefore this publication is recommended to anyone concerned with the well being of employees”. Whilst this may infer that the publication is targeted at employers, it also offers an insight as to the role a third party such as the Acas helpline may play in the developments that may ensue through the dignity at work mantra. For example, the document refers to the need to work in partnership with organisations that may be able to support organisations in combating workplace bullying. Is Acas a potential partner in this scenario? The results in this thesis revealed that some Acas advisors suggested that often only limited specific support could be offered to people calling about workplace bullying. There seems to be an appetite within governmental establishments that challenges the Acas helpline advisors’ perceptions in this regard. Acas could be a suitable partner who is able to leverage its significant experience and resources to support the Dignity at Work agenda. Based on the results of this thesis, this significant change of mandate would probably see them in a situation where their neutrality and independence could be drawn into question. As a prospective nationwide partner in supporting targets of workplace bullying, the ‘independent and neutral’ corner stone of Acas’ make up, may need to be accommodated alongside other important attributes that Acas possesses. For example, Acas also has the capability of providing consistency in its approach and services. This characteristic of Acas seems generally to be unrecognised. Acas’ established organisation, governance and structure lends itself towards being able to create stability and structure in its activities. It is argued here that ‘consistency’ is possibly a trait that other organisations offering similar services may find more difficult to achieve and would be a defining requirement to ensure fairness to those needing such support.

It is interesting to note that whilst advocating partnership approaches, the document also promotes individual intervention, through such activities as mediation, emphasising the importance of these taking place before matters

become inflamed. At what point in the process does the Acas helpline typically get called and is this timing commensurate with these recommendations? It seems possible, based on the response in this research that callers to the Acas helpline may have pursued other avenues beforehand that have failed and thus callers are turning to Acas as the next/last step in their efforts to resolve the situation. The literature on workplace bullying states that people turn to a variety of sources for help. It seems feasible to assume that a helpline such as Acas could be a first or possibly last source of support depending on the person's individual circumstances such as the type of employer, for example a small, large or public sector organisation. How do those charged with better dispute resolution work towards achieving a joined up aim? It is clear that the various agencies involved are all seeking harmonious employment environments, but how is this achieved? Does the Acas helpline have a role to play in what may be considered a utopian ideal?

If the Acas helpline were to work more in partnership with industry, trades unions and other intervening agencies, whilst retaining their strict independence and neutrality, what roles may they fulfil? What approaches may be appropriate that could meet the needs of callers, support organisations and yet still remain within the Acas' mandate defined by the UK Government? In order to provide a framework for this discussion it may be useful to summarise the themes that are apparent from the responses from the research participants. The results presented in chapter seven may be categorised into four types of calls illustrated in Table 10.1 below. This table aims to depict the possible role that could be fulfilled by Acas advisors depending on the expectation of the caller.

	Type I	Type II	Type III	Type IV
Definition	Objective information transfer	Subjective emotional support	Solution centric intervention	Organisational response to workplace bullying
The caller's question or need	<i>"Is this type of behaviour allowed?"</i>	<i>"Who can I talk to? Please help me"</i>	<i>"What do I need to do to stop being bullied?"</i>	<i>"There's alleged bullying in my company"</i>
The possible role of the advisor	To provide relevant, accurate information to enable the caller to assess her/his position	To provide empathetic support that provides the caller with the confidence to act	To provide appropriate methods that enable the caller to address the situation	To educate and advise how reactive and proactive measures may be implemented

Table 10.1: Bullying Typologies as perceived by research participants

Table 10.1, developed for this thesis, is illustrative in its representation of the 'proxy' subjects being employed to explore the callers' needs. Type IV calls have been excluded from this discussion. This is not to infer that they are less important. Few comments were made about these types of calls and as they do not represent individual interventions, they were not pursued.

It is likely that there are no rigid boundaries between the types of calls and the topics investigated. Advice regarding one particular request is likely to involve encompassing others during the same intervention. It is also likely that call types and therefore the roles played by the advisors will evolve during the intervention. What clues do the results offer that may provide insight as to why the caller is not necessarily succinct in their discussions with the advisor? Numerous respondents commented on the need to provide emotional support, or 'a shoulder to cry on'. It is argued here that the stories told by the callers and the support offered by the advisor is all part of the way callers employ coping mechanisms to deal with the experiences. Coping appears to be a common theme that flows through each call type, and therefore the role that is being played by the advisor is to help the caller cope with the situation in which they find themselves. It has been established that workplace bullying is a stressful situation that necessitates some forms of coping

mechanisms, (see for example, Olafsson and Johannsdottir, 2004, Hogh and Dofradottir, 2001 and Zapf and Gross, 2001). Does the Acas helpline provide a stress management service in cases of workplace bullying?

Stress Management

Similar to workplace bullying, the definitional debate around stress appears to be unresolved, (Richmond and Skitmore, 2006). The stress literature may be subdivided into organisational stress management (for example, James 1999) and individual stress management (for example, Kompier et al 2000), both having associated and comprehensive stress management programs (CSMP). How does a CSMP relate to the role played by an Acas advisor in cases of workplace bullying? First, it is clearly impractical to refer to Acas' current scope of operation within the helpline environment as being comprehensive. It has been explained in this thesis that the resource, training, scope, and function of the helpline are inevitably limited and interventions tend to be one-off. Nonetheless, the principles that stress management techniques adopt, and the demands of those calling the helpline, may offer useful clues as to the roles that the Acas helpline may provide in the future, assuming some modification to their operating model and current policies. Could the Acas helpline provide a more formalised coaching based service that aims to equip callers with clarity of understanding of the situation they face and then help them formulate means by which they can address the matter?

Coaching

Kohler and Munz (2006) in discussing coaching, describe it as a collaborative process focused on prospective actions that assist the individual in managing the stress they experience at work. This model, whilst useful, appears to have two distinct shortcomings. First, the aim seems to fall short of reducing or eliminating the stress, rather explaining how to live with it. Could it be that by taking such an approach, the Acas advisor may actually exacerbate the situation? As workplace bullying is known to have chronic, debilitating effects, (Hoel et al, 2004, Tehrani, 2004 and Zapf et al, 1996), such a modest aspiration may well result in the target of the bullying failing to manage the increasing stress levels. Second, the model

does not seem to differentiate between behavioural and cognitive approaches to stress management. Finally and maybe most importantly to Acas, it is unfeasible to coach one party in the dispute in an impartial manner, which would contradict one of Acas' guiding principles. Is there a way in which Acas can use cognitive based methods, communications, and techniques without taking sides?

Cognitive and Behavioural Interventions

Gardner et al (2005) clearly distinguish between cognitive and behavioural interventions into stress management, postulating that the methodology, method, and ensuing results show empirical differences as discussed in their research. Can the Acas helpline adopt a cognitive approach to the intervention they provide? Cognitive stress management is designed to help modify cognitive appraisals of situations. Behavioural stress management emphasises teaching behavioural coping skills. Gardner et al (2005) assert that cognitive approaches to intervention yield results that are more positive for the individual than behavioural approaches, although both techniques showed positive responses. These two points are important in assessing the usefulness of stress management techniques if applied to workplace bullying. People subjected to workplace bullying sometimes do not relate to the situation as bullying and have difficulty in understanding the concept when explained to them, which may be described as a cognitive failure or a coping mechanism (denial). It is also known that bullying tends to take place where a power differential of some sort exists between target and perpetrator suggesting that a behavioural response by the target is unfeasible in either addressing the bullying or managing stress.

Could an appropriate role for the Acas helpline be to provide a form of cognitive based stress management? Bunce (1997) provides a model that depicts factors that influence the outcome of individual focused stress management interventions. This encompasses both behavioural and cognitive approaches and illustrates the outcome for the individual based on their improved ability to cope with the prevailing circumstances. Kinman and Jones (2005) represent the results of their research in a model that explains the meaning of occupational stress and how it may be triggered. Drawing on Bunce (1997) and Kinman and Jones (2005),

figure 10.1 below is offered as a model that could provide some signposting for the future Acas helpline role when intervening in cases of workplace bullying.

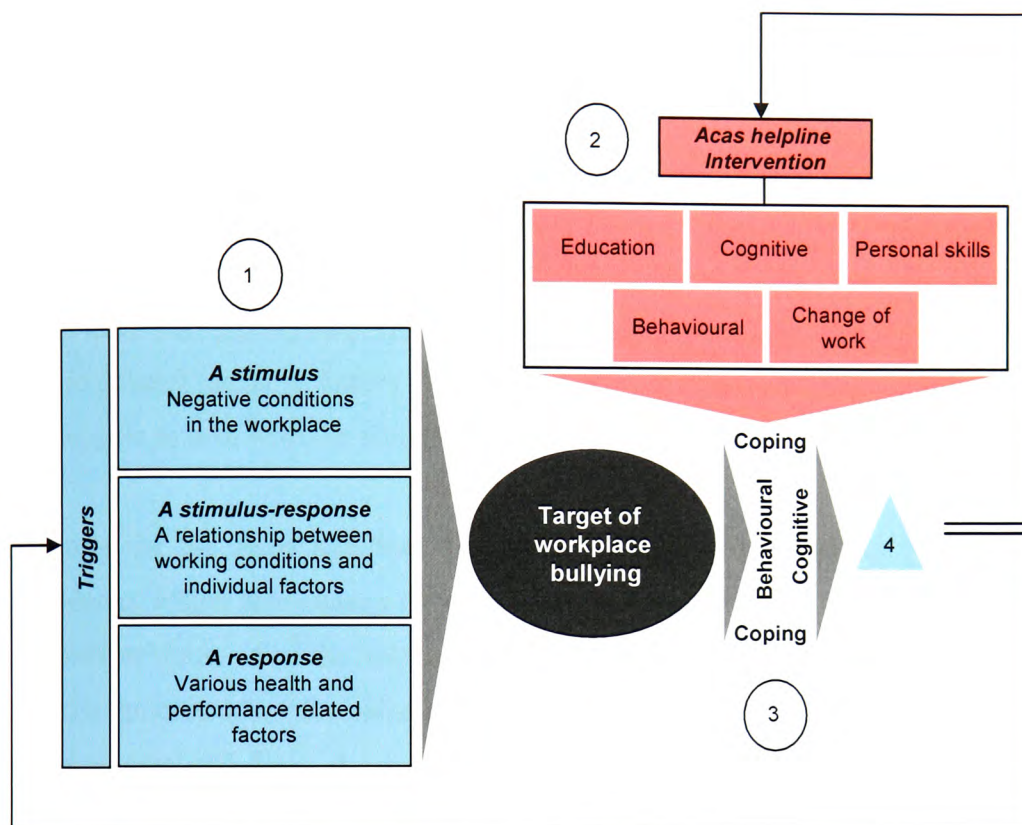


Figure 10.1: Potential model for individual based intervention into workplace bullying

If the model is applied to workplace bullying, then a simple narrative can explain a possible course of events. Point one establishes a series of events that take place which may cognitively manifest with a target of a bullying episode. This is important as the foundation for the model is to understand the cognitions of the target, rather than the behaviours of the perpetrator or the target. It provides an opportunity for the intervention to focus on a cognitive approach which does not rely on a behavioural change by the target. Point two represents the reactive intervention possibilities, which could be provided by Acas, upon which the individual can act. (These interventions include education, cognitive, personal skills, behavioural or change of work). Point three illustrates the behavioural and cognitive actions adopted by the target based on the intervention provided. Point

four represents the change in the situation facing the target. At this point in time, the stimuli may have changed. For example, the stimulus of a negative environment such as strict performance management may have been discussed with the helpline advisor such that the caller can now make sense of the situation. This means that the stimulus has probably become a stimulus-response whereby the caller is now able to identify the impact of the stimulus upon her/him and potential reasons or conditions that cause the stimulus to exist. The cognitive based intervention may mean the caller has placed a different meaning on her/his situation, thus modifying the way she/he interprets the stimulus. The role required by the intervening party may therefore also change. It is argued that this loop may require several journeys before the target is provided with sufficient information and support to deal with the situation.

The role for the Acas helpline is complex as numerous variables have to be considered, which also change over time. This is not illustrated in figure 10.1 yet warrants critique. For the intervention to be appropriate, the original stimulus must be understood by the caller and advisor in order for both to comprehend the situation that will form the basis of the conversation. If this requirement is satisfied, a relationship is likely to come about between the stimulus and intervening tool or technique. The technique must be commensurate with both the needs of the target and the matter that needs to be addressed. The information which is provided by Acas has to be able to explain the stimulus, (“you may be the subject of workplace bullying”) and succinct useful information on which to mount a plan that relieves the target of the treatment they face, (“this is what you need to know, and this is how you may wish to use the information”). The challenge faced by both parties, however, is that it is unlikely that the intervention is a one-off event and therefore a chronology or case would be required to facilitate the intervention. Is it possible that the advisor can ever understand the discourses and experiences the caller is facing? Earlier responses from advisors showed that they acknowledge the complexity of their role; that sometimes sees them as passive listeners; listening in an attempt to support the caller. Some also commented that they simply “passed on information” and would not even enter into conversation with the caller. The nub of the problem here seems to be that

trying to unravel an account of alleged workplace bullying consists of advisors trying to navigate through a conversational ‘fog’ that the caller does not see.

In summary, whilst this model has a definite benefit to providing a structure towards intervention into workplace bullying, it would require significant development to the policies and training of staff at the Acas helpline for it to succeed. This is because the emotional context of the role demands training and skills which as yet do not form part of the Acas helpline structures.

Emotion

“Let’s not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it”, Vincent Van Gogh, (cited in Wadwha, 2007).

Van Gogh’s insightful comment provides a useful reminder that emotions are important characteristics when considering intervention, and the role of the Acas helpline, for cases of workplace bullying. This thesis has already signposted in chapters four and five the relative importance of emotion both from a broad literature perspective but also in social identity theory. Both caller and advisor find themselves in a potentially emotionally charged situation where clarity of expression and understanding are critical. It is reasonable to postulate that both parties can find the process of regulating this emotional conversation a difficult one. The workplace bullying literature is resplendent with illustrations of high emotional states for those experiencing bullying, (see for example, Lee and Brotheridge, 2006, Agervold et al, 2004, and Tepper, 2000). Yet, because of an apparent absence of research, little is known of the emotional impact on those trying to resolve the situation.

One’s ability to regulate one’s emotions falls into the realms of coping (Haas et al, 2006) and it is argued here that the Acas helpline advisor has to cope with emotion, (their own and the caller’s) in order to provide a meaningful intervention. How does this work in practice? Clearly, this complex question cannot be comprehensively addressed in this thesis. It is feasible, however, to offer some suggestions that may be useful in future research. The cognitive

emotion regulation questionnaire, (CERQ) (Garnefski and Kraaij, 2007) may be a constructive technique that may be considered, modified or developed to help helpline advisors understand the callers' emotional state. Cognitive emotional regulation is the sub-conscious way that individuals handle the intake or emotionally arousing data. The CERQ was designed to help measure cognitive emotional regulation. Table 10.2, (adapted from Garnefski and Kraaij, 2007) depicts the nine strategies referring to what someone thinks after the experience of threatening or stressful events.

Emotional Regulation Strategy	Explanation
Self blame	Blaming what has been experienced on yourself
Other blame	Blaming what has been experienced on someone else
Rumination or focus on thought	Thinking about the feelings and thoughts associated with the negative event
Catastrophizing	Thoughts explicitly emphasizing the terror of what has been experienced
Putting into perspective	Thoughts that brush aside the seriousness of the event when compared to other events
Positive re-focusing	Thoughts about joyful and pleasant issues instead of thinking about the actual event
Positive re-appraisal	Thoughts about creating positive meaning to the event in terms of personal growth
Acceptance	Thoughts about accepting what has been experienced and resigning oneself to what has happened
Re-focus on planning	Thoughts about what steps to take to handle the negative event

Table 10.2: CERQ cognitive emotion regulation strategies

Where the caller is seeking emotional support, could the CERQ strategies provide a framework for the helpline advisor to build an appropriate response? By understanding the caller's emotion regulation strategy, based on one of the nine categories above, it seems feasible that appropriate support responses may be built into the model depicted in Table 8.2. Information that correlates to each of the nine strategies may be provided that offers an optimum response by the advisor given their assessment of the caller's needs. However, this is likely to require skill sets on the part of the Acas advisor, which currently appears to be under developed, such as counselling techniques and strategies.

One particular issue that this thesis faces with the proposal regarding the CERQ is that it presents certain philosophical challenges based on the traditions within which this research has been framed. The CERQ is a psychological positivist model that would appear to recognise the interpretive nature of emotion, yet measure it using a quantitative instrument, providing empirical results on which the model is based. Should such a potential conflict of philosophical positions be a concern? In order to address this question, one must consider the aim of the thesis; *what role do Acas helpline advisors fulfil when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying?*

The author posits that the CERQ may be a useful tool in developing the Acas helpline advisor role because it provide a more comprehensive intervention. Furthermore, from a philosophical standpoint, it may be that the way information is derived from using the model is more important than the information itself. The dyadic relationship between caller and advisor is inherently interpretive and it is alleged that subjectivity will always dominate their discussions due to the unique roles that each person plays in an episode.

Due to the dyadic nature of the intervention, the emotions of the advisor should not be discounted. The emotional regulation expected from helpline advisors is an important contributor in endeavouring to achieve a successful intervention. The advisor's work may be classified as emotional labour (for example see Brotheridge and Lee, 2003), where organisationally desired emotions are required to be demonstrated by the employee as part of their role (Zapf and Holz, 2006). It has been established that the response provided in social interaction by the recipient of an emotionally arousing message can have significant affects on the sender's emotion regulation strain (Côté, 2005). It would therefore appear to be appropriate that training for helpline advisors includes being able to display emotions that elicit information from callers. This would be essential and even critical for advisors in the development of the services they provide.

In summary, the role that Acas helpline advisors fulfil in providing emotional support is one that is inherently complex, subjective, and unique to each individual case. Attempting to understand the emotional disposition of the caller

is an important role for the advisor if she/he is to embark on providing useful emotional based support that equips the caller with either information or such constructs as, for example, confidence to address the situation. Appropriate models and theories exist that could provide signposts for future research in workplace bullying to establish how individualised intervention approaches may be augmented.

Conflict Management

This section of the chapter addresses the role that the Acas helpline may fulfil when dealing with targets of workplace bullying who wish to find a solution to the situation in which they find themselves. This has been categorised in Table 10.2 above as Conflict Management. This is because the target of the bullying episode wishes to attempt to manage the situation, in an endeavour to resolve it. This necessitates confronting the matter, if not the bully, in order to seek a solution.

In the context of workplace bullying, Hoel and Salin (2003) argue that interpersonal conflict is essentially an organisational antecedent to workplace bullying arising from stressful working environments, frustration and tensions. Interventions to address such problems are well addressed in various literatures. There is however a significant challenge in the intervention and workplace bullying literature that would appear to limit the usefulness of much of the research. Intervention, including third party intervention studies, tends to focus on the intervention event process and/or conversation between the conflicting parties. The role of the frontline Acas helpline does not conduct the actual intervention between the parties. The intervention made by the Acas helpline advisor is set within the discourse or journey of the person who perceives she/he is being bullied, (although this could be the bully also). The role of the helpline advisor is to equip the caller with information, techniques, or strategies to take forward knowledgeably a proposal that may resolve the bullying episode. Therefore, in this context, the intervention is not actually to manage conflict, but rather to facilitate one party towards a conflict management style resolution. It must be acknowledged that Acas has developed a service known as telephone conciliation where the Acas advisor, via an audio conference, does facilitate the resolution of conflict between two parties.

Sportsman (2005) stated that all conflicts are based on attempts to protect participants self esteem or change perceived inequities in power because most participants believe that the other person has greater power in the situation. Sportsman's claim provides a useful consideration as to how an Acas helpline advisor may fulfil a role that is based on facilitating conflict management. First, it is a broadly accepted position that workplace bullying is a phenomenon that displays power differentials between target and perpetrator, (for example see Salin, 2003). Second, it is also well recorded that lowered self esteem can be a consequence of workplace bullying, (see ??? for example). It can be reasonably assumed therefore that a target of workplace bullying wishing to enter into some form of conflict resolution wishes to improve their personal situation. The challenge that the Acas advisor faces in facilitating the conflict management is initially to establish the means and ways by which the target wishes to approach the matter. Only by first understanding the target's wishes, can the advisor have any chance of providing appropriate interventions to support the caller.

Bell and Song (2005) and Barki and Hartwick (2004) provide what may be a constructive model and typology that could be developed and used by helpline advisors to assess some of the pertinent points as to how the conflict is manifesting itself and how the target is relating to this manifestation. Figure 10.2 below illustrates a conceptual model drawing on Bell and Song (2005) and Barki and Hartwick (2004). What benefit could the explanation shown in this model offer in helping Acas helpline advisors? First, it provides a structured method of establishing the nature of the interpersonal conflict; what the conflict is, what it is manifesting itself as, and how that manifestation is being interpreted by the target. This could assist the advisor in gaining a relatively comprehensive appreciation of the caller's situation. Second, it could provide some guidance as to appropriate courses of action to take depending on the typology of the conflict, although in its current guise, it does not explain any potential associations between the interpersonal relationship and personal sense of impact. This is possibly a signpost for possible future research. It may be feasible to draw some understanding that can relate the way that targets of workplace bullying associate the conflict, their relationship with the perpetrator (and maybe others in the

episode) as well as the impact it has on them. If this could lead to a way of providing constructive advice, then maybe a step forward could be made in resolving the conflict that workplace bullying causes.

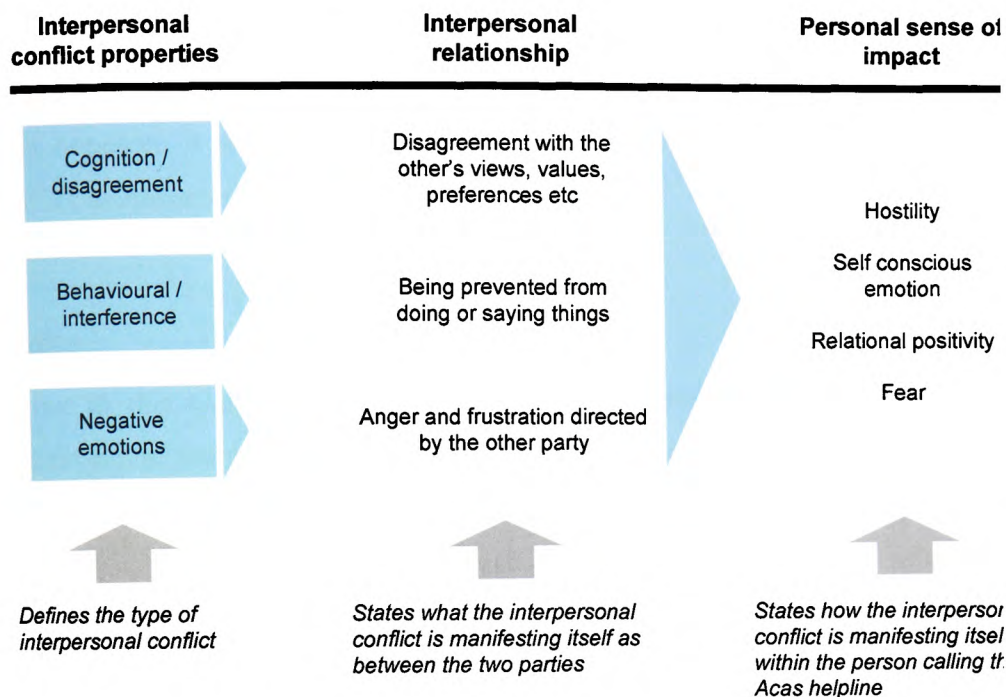


Figure 10.2: Typologies of conflict management. Adapted from Bell and Song (2005) and Barki and Hartwick (2004)

Acas' role in providing this suggested model of support clearly adheres to the principle that Acas cannot actually intervene between the two parties in conflict. This style of intervention is described by Elangovan (1995) as Low Control Strategy. This means that the intervention is not active on the part of the intervening party. Rather, the intervention is conducted using influencing tactics, encouraging either or both parties to resolve the matter by offering suggestions that may be appropriate. Such an approach has been endorsed by Conlon and Fasolo (1990) who suggest that disputants prefer the intervention to be less direct, loosely controlled and less quick, inferring that the disputants may benefit from being left to wrangle with each other before the intervention takes place. This assertion is contrary to Elangovan's view (1995) that refers to managing different types of conflicts in different ways. This has important implications for the suggestions made in this chapter. First, a loosely controlled intervention is not

advised in cases of conflict such as workplace bullying. Second, where power differentials are evident, a speedy approach is considered more appropriate, (Conlon and Fasolo, 1990). It could be reasonable to conclude that Acas may have limited success in managing the conflict from a distance in cases of workplace bullying. Does this make the Acas helpline somewhat futile if the caller is seeking support to resolve the matter? Possibly, this may well be the case; however, it may also be premature to draw a line under the endeavour of conflict management in its entirety.

Coping

Earlier in this chapter and thesis, coping was identified as a key element in understanding the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Could a feasible role for the Acas helpline be to provide an intervention that consists of a coping mechanism, thereby providing the target with a means to 'carry on' rather than become further distressed and possibly isolated and detached from the workplace? Whilst this could be viewed as a modest aspiration, one must further consider coping in the context of a reactive, supportive intervention and the notion of self coping to better understand what role the Acas helpline could possibly fulfil.

Schwarzer and Schwarzer (1996) provide an excellent basis on which coping may be examined in the context of this thesis. Moos and Schaefer (1993) cited in Lemyre and Lee (2006) also provide a useful foundation model to consider the caller's position, wants and needs when engaging the Acas helpline. Depending on the caller's predisposition towards the episode could possibly determine the approach they may wish to adopt based on one of the four categories depicted in figure 10.3.

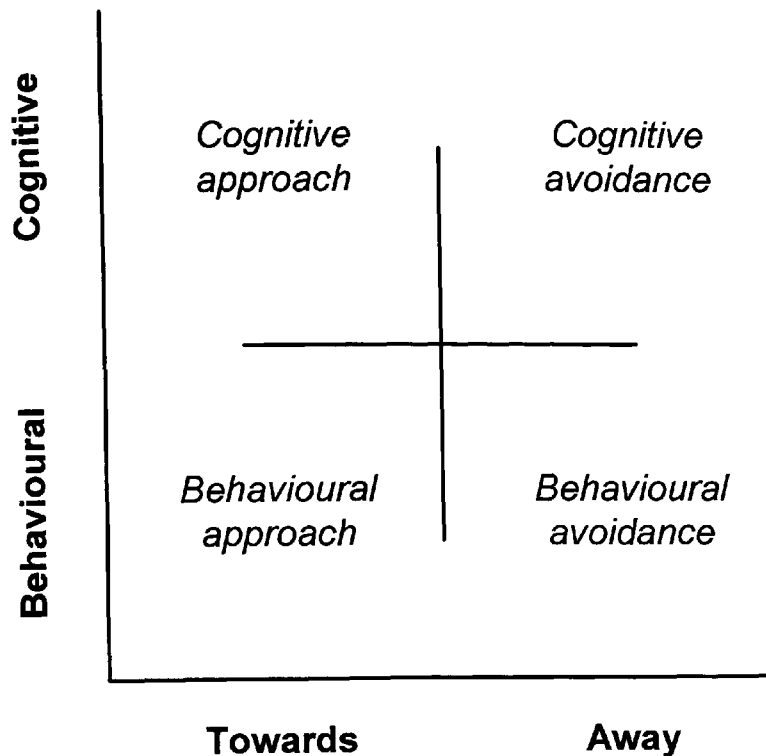


Figure 10.3: Dual Axis Coping Model. Moos and Schaefer, 1993.

What role could the Acas helpline fulfil where supporting the caller's ability to cope may be a laudable aim? Many instruments exist that examine, evaluate, measure, assess, and provide strategies for coping, often based on psychometric scales. Two particular considerations must be borne in mind when considering the Acas helpline. Is the instrument or technique feasible and practical to be used by someone who is unlikely to be a psychologist, sociologist, or clinical practitioner and from a philosophical perspective, how well do appropriate instruments' methodologies submit to the traditions of social construction and the general philosophical approach adopted in this research? As a DBA, this research will prioritise those approaches which, whilst scholarly, also present an opportunity to provide significant practical and constructive contributions to the Acas helpline. Therefore, of the 13 instruments and models discussed in Schwarzer and Schwarzer (1996), many have been discounted as being inappropriate for this research because either they are unsuitable in cases of workplace bullying or because it would be improper to employ them within the Acas helpline environment, primarily because they are based on face to face consultations.

Figure 10.4 represents the author's interpretation of the instruments selected from Schwarzer and Schwarzer (1996). Whilst these models cannot be arbitrarily combined or manipulated to suit the needs of this thesis, they can provide signposts to help explain and understand what role the Acas helpline may fulfil and, moreover provide the workplace bullying research debate with some direction for possible future research.

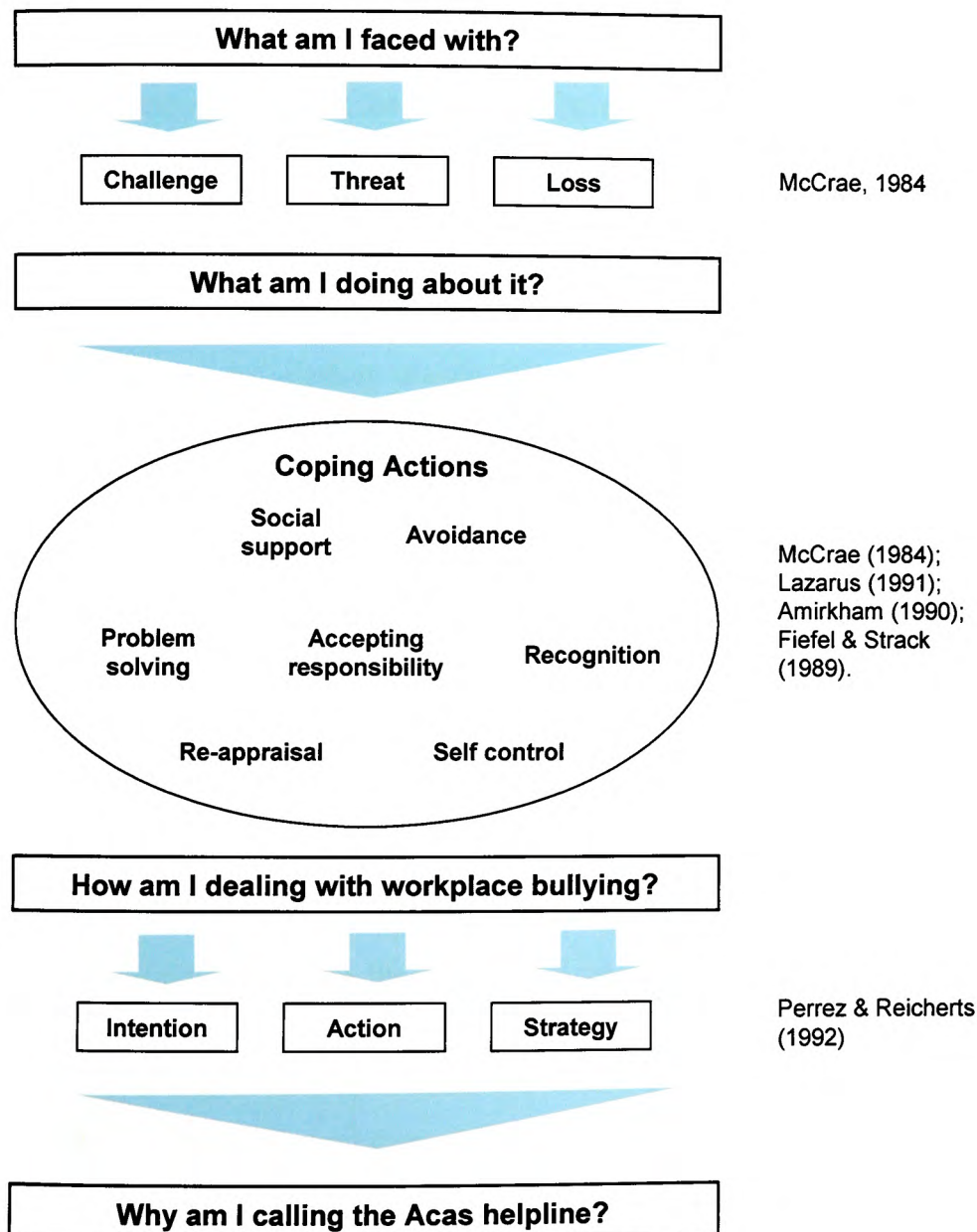


Figure 10.4: Representing potential coping needs of callers to the Acas helpline

Could the model in Figure 10.4 be developed for use by the Acas helpline and/or similar agencies providing support in cases of alleged workplace bullying? The model asks a number of pertinent questions relating to the target's circumstance in the workplace bullying discourse. First, with what is the target confronted? Is it a challenge, (possibly the onset of bullying), a threat, (perhaps the personal manifestation of the bullying actions) or a loss, (maybe the consequences of the bullying actions). This provides the helpline advisor with context as to the caller's perspective on what it is they have to cope with at the time of the call.

Second, the model asks what the caller is doing about the bullying. Examples of coping actions shown in the model may lack the context specific relationship with workplace bullying. It is argued, however, that they represent likely coping actions in a workplace bullying milieu. The third question aims to understand how the caller is approaching their actions. Whilst it may be assumed that the intention, action, and strategy should be coherent, it may be that under the pressure of a social stressor such as bullying, this may not be the case, and that the caller's method of coping may benefit from investigation by the advisor. Finally, the model asks why the caller is contacting the Acas helpline. At this juncture, it may be particularly important for the advisor to consider the categorisation depicted in Moos and Schaefer's Dual Axis Coping Model, (1993) to establish core characteristics of the caller's coping approach.

The importance of coping, whilst well documented in generic terms, has not been thoroughly explored in the workplace bullying research agenda. Therefore, it is improper to offer a summary here that supposes a concrete conclusion. Notwithstanding this gap in the research, Acas could well be an authoritative source of providing advice on coping mechanisms as they are unable to intervene directly. It is argued here that coping is a vital 'support' function that has to be fulfilled for targets of workplace bullying to navigate successfully a course through the resolution journey. Whilst it is likely that coping mechanisms may be presented in many indirect forms through social networks for example, nonetheless there is a need for dedicated means of resourcing one's ability to cope in the face of adversity which must surely be a welcome oasis during periods of

despondency. To consider coping as a technique for use exclusively during the bullying episode, however, may be somewhat short sighted.

How does one's ability to cope affect the post bullying environment? This brief section of the chapter aims only to illuminate on what is contested here to be an untouched area of the workplace bullying debate, which may have connotations for the Acas helpline. If it were assumed that cases of workplace bullying are generally resolved, where does this leave the target? Fox and Stallworth (2006) concluded that an apology often has the potential to resolve cases of workplace bullying without the need for further intervention. Fox and Stallworth's assertion is a feature of Michael Gibbon's recommendations in his 2007 report to the UK Government, (Gibbons, 2007) where he suggests early dispute resolution may be achieved through apologies from the alleged perpetrators of the conflict. He adds that such an approach as an apology is not a solution that is available through formal channels of resolution such as employment tribunals. This means that if the target of the bullying wants an apology in order to put the matter behind them, there is, in theory, no benefit to them in pursuing a formal route to dispute resolution.

Having received an apology, in what position does the target find themselves? This thesis puts forward three possible situations where the Acas helpline could play a role. First, following an apology, it seems reasonable that the target could be stigmatized. They could be considered weak in the eyes of the perpetrators (or others), or as Crocker et al (1998), cited in Major and O'Brien (2005) suggests she/he could be considered a less than whole person, tainted and discounted. This is not to imply that such phenomena as PTSD may be evident, rather that the target simply feels less than she/he did before the bullying episode(s).

Second, the hurt felt by the target may linger after the objective external resolution of the episode. Lewis (2004) states how recipients of bullying retain feelings of shame long after an episode has ended and one can assume 'hurt' or other forms of resentment might also remain deeply embedded. How one recovers from hurt to the point of forgiveness appears to be absent from the workplace bullying literature, although Knutson et al (2008) also recognise a

broad absence of writing on forgiveness generally. It is evident that the Acas helpline cannot provide a counselling service, nor does it currently appear to offer advice on how one party might reconcile with the other. This shortfall remains despite the fact that Acas has over 30 years of conciliation experience. This is of course rooted in formal employment relationship disputes rather than the individualised constructs that this thesis has largely explored. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to imagine that it would not be difficult for Acas to apply the lessons learned from the industrial relations disputes and the roots of conciliation into a landscape of one-on-one relationships.

Thus far, this chapter has discussed some of the possible roles that the Acas helpline could fulfil. Reflecting on those explored, it becomes clear that the helpline has a number of challenges. Given the importance that is being placed upon it, reflected in the investments being committed, it is evident that it needs to evolve and further improve. Governmental policy is to reduce the number of claims made in employment tribunals. This policy creates the 'burning platform' demanding change within the Acas helpline. Gibbons, (2007) has made clear that early dispute resolution is one key factor in reducing the number of claims. The need to develop the helpline service appears obvious. This leads to Acas' second challenge. Into what does the Acas helpline evolve? It has already been suggested in this thesis that the investment commitment should not simply focus on creating greater telephone answering capacity. The level of change to the rank and file helpline advisor may however be a significant one when considering the discussion in this chapter. It seems that the Acas' heyday of major industrial relations conciliation may be played out once again, but much more as disputes at an individual level. The challenge seems to be whether Acas can re-invent the successes it has enjoyed over the past 30 years in what is essentially one on one workplace conflicts. The opportunity for evolution and change seems only to be limited to Acas' ability to transform the helpline service into a comprehensive support service for employees and employers alike.

Conclusions to the Thesis

This thesis set out to critically examine the role of the Acas helpline when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying. The results reveal a number

of important observations. Possibly and most importantly, both the outcome and impact of the intervention and therefore its success, is subjective and often vague. Sometimes the caller or the advisor perceives the outcome to be inadequate. Whilst Acas is clearly providing a valuable service via the helpline, it is clear that often the advisor perceives that there is more that should be done or offered, but this is outside the scope of what they are mandated to do. In a role where there are multi faceted calls ranging for example from dismissal to legal rights, is workplace bullying a step too far for Acas to address? It seems that Acas may need to consider the value of what could be construed as a superficial effort in intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying. The skills needed by the advisor coupled with the expectations of the caller, as described by the research participants, do not appear to be entirely compatible, especially if both parties are aiming to catalyse a situation that could lead to a real solution that may be implemented.

Implications for Acas and their Advisors

There are many conclusions that could be inferred from these results that point towards the need for future research into workplace bullying intervention. There is also much to draw upon which offers implications for Acas as a body corporate and the advisors it employs. In the broadest terms, it is apparent that there is a lack of intervention studies in the workplace bullying literature. This study has demonstrated a contribution to addressing that shortcoming, but scope still exists for significantly more research to be conducted. As a DBA thesis, this research set out to be of constructive use for practitioners in industry, whether the public or private sector. It is argued here that what has been presented has met this objective.

A recent UK based conference, organised by UNITE, the UK's largest trade union, included workplace bullying in its agenda. The conference made explicit calls for an evidence base to assist in the process of providing practical interventions that would help trade unionists represent their membership in the struggle to deal with workplace bullying. The evidence presented in this thesis can rightfully make some small contribution to this call for help.

This thesis will assist Acas in its deliberations as to how an element of the £30M additional resource might be appropriately applied to the challenge of helping the advisors tackle the challenge of workplace bullying. Through careful and selective examination of wider bodies of literature and research, this thesis has both broadened the horizons of the workplace bullying debate and provided positive signposts towards future research.

In the very broadest of terms, any intervention would be designed to have a positive outcome, otherwise why would one waste resource to facilitate the intervention. The evidence in this thesis makes it clear that the helpline advisor must critically and with efficacy understand, interpret, and digest a complex set of information within an already multi-faceted landscape. An advisor needs to include a chronological understanding of the circumstances, an understanding of what the caller is trying to achieve, and how they can constructively intervene in the caller's aims.

The Acas helpline advisor cannot conduct a physical intervention into the case that the caller alleges is taking place. They cannot monitor or 'police' the situation. The evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates it is likely that the caller's discussion with the advisor will often be a single telephone call. This means that the advisor needs to gather as much data about the individual as possible and provide appropriate information to the caller for them to be able to use the information as a source of cognitive stimulation to deal with the situation that the caller sees as most appropriate.

The clear indication from this thesis is that the advisor, rather unknowingly, has a much more dominant role that they may realise. It is apparent from the data in this thesis that the advisor makes a rapid assessment of the caller's emotional state, their personal agenda, their cognitions and their personal journey through the bullying episode. Through interpreting and understanding this, the advisor is likely to place themselves in a more advantageous position from which to facilitate or even marshal the caller's ensuing actions. The advisors' ability to handle these levels of complexity should be considered carefully by Acas as an important contribution in the skill mix of its professional services. The notion that

advisors are simply telephone operatives functioning in a call centre environment does both them and their client a great deal of disservice.

It seems a tall order that an advisor, in a single discussion, regardless of its complexity and length, is expected to provide a panacea of solutions. It is argued that the more probable role that the Acas helpline advisor could, and maybe does play, is one of providing coping mechanisms for the caller. Providing one source of coping mechanisms alone falls short of providing the tools for a workplace bullying solution. One must question however, whether such an aim is truly realistic. The need to be able to cope under any stressful situation is important in order to 'survive' the experience. Therefore, whilst it is for others to provide what may be considered more tangible and physical interventions, whether at work or in the home, the Acas helpline may well be a 'silent partner' in this process. This thesis contends that Acas, through its advisors, is providing a source of coping energy for the target and a means of sensitive, informed facilitating and signposting towards eventual resolution, whatever that may be.

Implications for Future Research

In the broad sense of intervention research, the methodological approach adopted by this thesis offers what may be considered a departure from the dominant bodies of post-positivist literature. This alone is contended to catalyse implications for future research. This is because through the qualitative approach adopted in this investigation, the thesis has examined the perspectives of those tasked with providing intervention, rather than the outcome of the intervention process *per se*.

The process of intervention in such situations, as those studied in this research, is essentially a social interaction and as such the intervention research debate needs to better understand the human process that facilitates intervention episodes. This is an important research implication. Notwithstanding the reason for the intervention, the processes followed or the prescription or advice offered, the success or otherwise may well be in part dependent on the social relationship forged between the two parties.

Considering the duality of the relationship between the caller and the Acas helpline advisor has provided a useful viewpoint in the way that intervention is constructed. It is argued that this corpus of work has provided a useful and significant insight into the ways in which intervention occurs in the Acas helpline environment, but has not examined the caller experience. This has research implications that need to be considered in two ways. First, for the intervention research agenda to develop its understanding of the way dyadic intervention takes place, the client perspective must form part of the debate. Second, and inextricably linked to the first, is how this may be achieved. Where the intervention is of a personal or emotional nature, it seems likely that the service provider may be bound by ethical commitments such as confidentiality. Whilst this may mean that the body of knowledge becomes somewhat one sided, this should not deter future research ambitions.

Another area of interest and which has research implications is the way in which the success of interventions is measured. How can the intervention's success be measured without measuring the success of the relationship between those involved in the process? The research implication is to first consider what constitutes success and second whether the relationships that exist help the intervention to be successful or whether the intervention is successful because the social interaction is positive. The challenge that may present itself in attempting to address these complex potential research questions is how an appropriate methodology may be employed. It seems that the questions may favour an interpretive approach, although the answers being sought are better identified through a positivist one. Maybe Hoel and Beales' (2006) call for a contextualised and interdisciplinary approach in workplace bullying research could be applied to this dilemma.

This research has enabled the workplace bullying debate to consider the subject of intervention from a perspective that has hitherto been unfeasible. Maybe the more important questions, however, are first how the contributions made by this thesis inform the research agenda and second what implications this has for research and practice? Taking an academic perspective, it is clear that the popular and ongoing

definitional debate appears to remain in a state of flux, and it may be that this is an appropriate place for it to reside, certainly for the time being.

Taking a practical perspective, there may be a more real issue that permeates the research debate. Whilst many of the workplace bullying commentators have argued that it is a complex phenomenon, it is argued here that those tasked with dealing with the day to day realities of workplace bullying may not have the same appreciation or even awareness. Therefore, it seems that there may be practical implications to the research agenda to educate people such as Acas helpline advisors, whereby they have a more conscious level of understanding of the complexities, ambiguities and nuances of the workplace bullying phenomenon.

In order to provide the knowledge that is necessary to understand and help those charged with intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying, this thesis suggests that several signposts may be offered that could guide future research opportunities. The steady growth of self help groups, such as DAWN and the Andrea Adams Trust suggest that there is a demand for the services they provide. There is a need for these groups to be researched in order that their model of intervention can be better understood. Academic institutions, such as the Anti Bullying Centre at Trinity College Dublin and the Centre for Research on Workplace Bullying at the University of Glamorgan, provide consultancy, research and advice on workplace bullying. By the nature of their activities they intervene or observe interventions. Their perspectives may provide an additional dimension that could encapsulate the various parties in the episode.

The proliferation of EAP providers appears also to be an area that could provide research opportunities that could build on this initial contribution. The nature of EAPs means that they deal with a wide range of demands, usually by telephone, which may include cases of workplace bullying. The range of companies offering EAP services as a support mechanism for employees infers that EAPs are fundamentally a welcomed proposition by both employers and employees. Does this mean that the interventions they provide are successful? What do their clients want and need from a telephone based helpline? How do they determine success? These are questions that may help build on this initial contribution into

intervention provided by this thesis. Furthermore, for those EAPs who also provide occupational health services, there is an opportunity to consider case study approaches to specific episodes that may further enrich the knowledge that is required to progress the workplace bullying research agenda.

The development and expansion of intervention research proposed here also provides an opportunity to develop the models composed for this thesis. For example, Table 10.4 could be pursued further to ask what outcome the caller expects from the intervention episode, as this is possibly an appropriate conclusion to this model. An alternative research approach to the development of models applied to workplace bullying could consider Glasl (1994). Glasl's (1994) well established and recognised conflict escalation model offers that different forms of intervention occur at different times along the continuum of the model. Complementary qualitative investigations into these interventions and the ways in which they occur could provide a wealth of knowledge that may help evolve processes and policies in the workplace that reduces the damage caused by workplace bullying.

It is argued that this along with the significant contribution this thesis presents, numerous research implications arise. Alongside these implications are meaningful signposts that offer some direction and options for pursuing the avenue of research this thesis has begun. It is contended that to provide real benefit for all those interested in this phenomenon, a juxtaposed approach combining qualitative and quantitative approaches may well be a critical success factor. Moreover, whatever approaches are adopted by future researchers, it seems evident that the need for practical knowledge that can be applied in organisations is essential to address workplace bullying from an informed and educated position built upon a critical evidence base.

Closing Comments

As this thesis draws to a close, it is apparent that providing singular conclusions with clarity is incredibly difficult. The mire of seeming social complexity apparent in workplace bullying, where there is bias from the top of organisations and jaundice from the workforce at the bottom, (Westhues, 2008), places the Acas

helpline in what could be regarded as a challenging position. Where bullying at one extreme may be an unnecessarily oversensitive individual human being and at the other, someone subjected to extreme psychological or physical torment, it is clear that Acas' role is one of walking a tightrope as they attempt to interpret callers' needs, balanced with the restrictions, both imposed and self imposed. At a more macro level, the Government is adopting a position that is likely to complicate Acas' role through their support of Gibbons recommendations. Furthermore, Acas will need to address, during a period of the economic cycle where employer/employee conflict is likely to be heightened, a very difficult and challenging set of workplace circumstances.

It seems obvious now after three years of studying this specific scenario of the Acas helpline that a clarity of purpose is an essential attribute not only for those employed on the Acas helpline, but also for those tasked with leading, facilitating, and strategising the overall service provided by Acas. This may be due in part to the naivety of the researcher, but it also seems striking that a degree of naivety must also exist within Acas. The contributions of the participants to this thesis illuminates the significant task of providing a value added service to UK workplaces faced with the uncertainty of grappling with such a slippery concept as workplace bullying. Whilst £30M may seem a lot of money, it really is a small amount given the estimated cost to the UK economy from workplace bullying at £682.5M and 100M days lost productivity, (Hoel, Giga, and Lewis, 2008).

This body of work is but a snapshot in time based on the views, thoughts, and comments of key participants in an organisation. That organisation, Acas, finds itself on the horns of a dilemma. One of those horns may skewer to the very core of Acas' *raison d'être*. The Acas vision is underpinned by six key pledges, the second of which is to meet customer needs. Is this a feasible aspiration when, as one respondent put it, "It's difficult to try and pinpoint what the impact of our role actually is". How does one fulfil customer needs if the needs are unclear and if it is not possible to provide the customer with what they want; justice, retribution, emotional support, counselling, coaching, coping, and stress relief, but to name a selection? At least, this is the position at Acas in late 2008. If the political will

inside Acas is to truly meet customer needs, at least for workplace bullying, these complex levels of support must be engaged.

This thesis set out to answer the question ‘What role does the Acas helpline fulfil when intervening in cases of alleged workplace bullying?’ It is contended that the role is in fact not singular, but instead an assorted and complex set of individualised agendas. This thesis has shown a series of brief snapshots of how those charged with providing this important service regard their individual and collective contributions. These contributions, although seemingly small in the grand scheme of things, nevertheless do provide valuable, and for some, life changing support mechanisms. At the commencement of this thesis some three years ago, little was known about helplines generally, let alone the Acas helpline. In some small way, this thesis has begun to address this shortcoming. It is therefore contended that this work makes a contribution to our understanding of not only a helpline as a tool of intervention, but more so the broader question of interventions *per se*. This contribution is offered both to the academy and to practice in equal measure.

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Appendix A: Workplace Bullying Websites

Academic Bullying websites	www.port.ac.uk/research
	Charlotte Rayner from Portsmouth university offers information to academics and practitioners on workplace bullying and how to deal with it. This website offers examples of recent research, literature, and conferences.
	www.abc.tcd.ie
	The anti bullying research and resource centre in Dublin was established in 1996 by Mona O'Moore. This website aims to provide an understanding to help prevent or deal with cases of workplace bullying and bullying in schools. It offers a reference library, advice and guidance. The Anti Bullying Centre (ABC) also provides research advice, development services for schools. ABC also offers counselling services for bullies and victims.
	www.bullying.no
	Founded by Stale Einarsen, the Bergen Bullying Group is an academic forum who research workplace bullying. This websites aims to publish theoretical, empirical and applied contributions to the workplace bullying research debate and promote the Negative Acts Questionnaire, (NAQ).
	www.bohrf.org.uk
	BOHRF is the British Occupational Health Research Foundation and claims to 'Bring employers and researchers together to produce research that will contribute to good employee health and performance at work'. They commissioned research into workplace bullying which was published in 2006, (Hoel and Giga 2006). BOHRF's interests are wider than workplace bullying alone.

Workplace conditions websites	www.eurofound.eu.int
	The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has published extensive research on a variety of subjects. In 2006, it published an article on Violence, Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace. The website offers resources linked to workplace bullying amongst many other subjects.
	www.digitalopinion.co.uk
	Digital Opinion is a research company which helps its clients to design and conduct a range of employee and customer surveys and other research. It claims to have conducted research into workplace bullying and offers numerous forms of advice and support on workplace bullying.
	www.dignityatwork.org
	Dignity at Work is a partnership between numerous private sector companies, trades unions, other anti bullying at work campaign groups and the Government. Their aim is to increase awareness and build respect in organisations. It is apparent, but not explicit, on their website that workplace bullying is the key issue they are attempting to eradicate in their quest for dignity at work.
	www.tuc.org.uk
	The Trades Union Congress website provides relatively high level communication and signposting on workplace bullying as well as many other work related subjects from a trades' union perspective. There are many other unions that provide similar information that have not all been listed here. The websites include www.gmb.org.uk , www.amicustheunion.org , www.connect.org.uk , www.unison.org.uk and www.rmt.org.uk .

Independent Support Network Workplace Bullying Websites	www.atl.org.uk
	The Association of Teachers and Lecturers professes to be a professional body to educationalists. Its advice on bullying is contextualised for teachers and includes advice on bullying by parents of children who may be in their class
	www.andreaadamstrust.org
	The Andrea Adams Trust is a well established organisation formed to provide information, mainly to victims of workplace bullying. Andrea Adams was a journalist who in 1992 wrote a book titled Bullying at Work, (Adams 1992). Her death in 1995 led to the formation of this trust to continue the work she was doing at the time on workplace bullying.
	www.banbullyingatwork.com
	This website is a campaign specific website promoting the 'ban bullying at work day'. It appears to be affiliated to the dignity at work website.
	www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk
	Established by Christine Pratt in 2002, the website offers resources for victims of workplace bullying and notes 'bullies need help too'.
	www.bullying999.co.uk
	Bullying999 appears to be a recent addition to the online community on workplace bullying. Its aim is specifically related to bullying practices experienced in the UK emergency services.
	www.bullyonline.org
	This website was established by Tim Field in 2004 having originally set up a telephone helpline service in 1996. The website now claims to be the world's largest resource on bullying related subjects, including schools and family bullying.

Professional Institutions	www.cipd.co.uk
	The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) originally produced its 'fact sheet' on workplace bullying in 1997, (having most recently updated it in April 2007). The CIPD website offers information targeted at HR professionals and covers such subjects as policy, definition, and responsibilities. There are also signposts to other allied resources.
	www.managers.org.uk
	The Chartered Institute of Management offers advice online to managers who are being bullied and to managers in forming anti bullying policy.
Government Based Organisations	www.cre.gov.uk
	The Commission for Racial Equality views workplace bullying through the lens of racial discrimination and together with the CIPD claim that black, Asian and ethnic employees are more likely to be bullied than others are. Their website is oriented to provide information to victims of bullying who are in ethnic minorities.
	www.eoc.org.uk
	The Equal Opportunities Commission provides information on workplace bullying in the context of its primary aim, which is to eliminate gender discrimination. This is achieved online by promoting relevant information through fact sheets and the events that are held regionally through what they call the Equality Exchange.
	www.businesslink.gov.uk
	This website is part of the UK Government online portal and is aimed at practitioners seeking advice on all aspects of workplace bullying.

Appendix B: Research Information

Appendix B1: Information provided to all participants prior to the research commencing.

Appendix B2: Information used by researcher during the interviews and focus groups.



Appendix

B1

University of Glamorgan Business School

“Understanding the role of third party intervention in workplace bullying”

Participant Information Sheet

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the role that Acas plays in providing third party intervention in cases of workplace bullying. This is important research. We know that workplace bullying is increasing and that the support victims of bullying receive may be important in understanding how they deal with the situation. Support may be offered from many different sources. The support provided by Acas is important because of Acas' position in industry and in the case of this research because the support is being offered from outside the organization where the bullying is taking place.

Why me?

You are being approached to take part in this study because you have a direct involvement in communicating with people who call Acas. Acas employees in Cardiff, Bristol, Birmingham, and Fleet will be contributing to this research. Your experiences, opinions, and views are very important for me to understand. This is because your experiences are unique and very



relevant in understanding the role you play in workplace bullying. The sessions may be focus groups or one to one interviews and will last for approximately 45 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do, you are asked to sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me. You are still free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

During the discussion group or interview, I will ask a number of questions. There is no right or wrong answers. I am not here to assess you in any way. I am only seeking to understand your experiences in supporting people who call Acas who may be the subject of workplace bullying. You will be asked to comment on the questions I have asked or in a group session discuss the question together. The session will be electronically recorded but you are assured that all the information you give will be kept strictly confidential. You will also be asked not to disclose what other people might have said as their views will also be confidential. The electronic files and transcripts [copies of the meeting in writing] will be stored securely. They will only ever be accessed by me. Your confidentiality is assured at all times. All data relating to these sessions will be destroyed after five years.

What if I have any concerns?

If you have a concern or any questions about any aspect of this research please contact me in the first instance. I will endeavour to answer any questions you might have. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University of Glamorgan Business School, the details of which are below.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

No person taking part in the study will be named and only the researcher will be aware of the participants. All of the transcripts and electronic files will be kept in a secured location which is only accessed by the researcher.

What happens to the results of the research?



A transcript of the sessions you partake in as well as the results of the study will be made available to you upon request. The results of the study will be included in my doctoral thesis and will be made available to the examining academic staff at the University of Glamorgan. It is hoped that the study will be published in appropriate journals/publications. The consent form you are asked to sign is to give me your permission to use the research findings in published articles so that other researchers and support agencies may benefit in some way from my work. You will not be named or identified in any way in these published articles.

This study was reviewed by the University of Glamorgan Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you in advance for your contribution.

Peter Williams

DBA Doctoral Student

University of Glamorgan Business School

Treforest

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26th March 2007



Consent Form

Title of Research **Intervention in workplace bullying: understanding the role played by third party support agencies**

Name of Researcher **Peter Williams**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 26th March 2007 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that in giving my consent that the results of the study might be published in academic journals or reports.
4. I accept that I must keep the content of the information given by others in this discussion group/interview as confidential. I will not disclose what other people have said.
5. I consent to the discussion group/interview being audio recorded.
6. I agree to take part in the above study.

Please initial each box

Name of Acas employee

Signature

Date

Name of researcher

Signature

Date

Acas office location

Focus Group / Interview

When completed, 1 copy for Acas employee; 1 copy for researcher file

“Understanding the role of third party intervention in workplace bullying”

Questions and Discussion Items

1. Introduction

Introduce self

DBA – what is it?

My research interest in workplace bullying – research to date

Why is this important?

What role do you have to play?

My position as a researcher

My thanks in anticipation of their invaluable contribution

2. Participants' information and Consent Form

Give out, explain and ask for signed copies to be returned

Explain why this is required – outline that this is part of ethical procedure in research

3. Agenda

I will intentionally not ask leading questions, closed questions where yes or no would be acceptable answers.

I would like you to comment and develop the question I ask through discussion amongst yourselves. I am here to help if you get stuck or need clarification

Refer to participants' information – no right or wrong answers, confidentiality assured, not seeking for you to breach confidentiality placed upon you by your clients.

If you think my questions are missing the point and there are important things that I am not asking you about, please tell me this and we will move the conversation to cover those items.

Reiterate informed consent.

Inform everyone you are now going to switch on recording equipment – also tell when turning off

4. Questions for focus groups and 1-2-1 interviews

No	Question	Area of interest for research
1.	<p>In your work at Acas, if you have received calls from people who claim to have been bullied, what does workplace bullying mean to you?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Why do you think this? What has influenced you in thinking this? What characterizes workplace bullying in your experience? How do you gauge whether someone has been bullied or not? What if you haven't received calls of this nature but might? 	<p>Definitions of bullying</p> <p>Personal perceptions</p> <p>Realities created by individuals and group around bullying</p> <p>How did they build their definition</p> <p>Influencing factors in drawing their own conclusions</p> <p>How they apply the definitions they have created in determining if a caller is being bullied</p>
2.	<p>When you take a call from someone who claims is being bullied why do you think they are calling Acas?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What might they get from Acas that others are not providing? Where else might they go? How have they reached a decision to call Acas? 	<p>Their interpretation of the victims' position and the victims' discourses</p> <p>Their interpretation of the role they will play in the ensuing discourse</p> <p>Their perception of the wider discourses that surround the specific episode and wider phenomenon</p>
3.	<p>What role do you play in the first contact with the caller?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How does the relationship between you develop? What is the caller expecting from you? What role do you expect to play? What benefit is there to the caller? What happens after the end of the first contact? 	<p>What discourse plays out in the first contact?</p> <p>What roles do actors play?</p> <p>How are these roles created?</p>
4.	<p>What role does Acas as a whole play in supporting alleged victims of bullying?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What do you feel Acas is providing here? How constructive is the role that Acas provides? Why does Acas provide this service? 	<p>Establish if a difference is perceived between what the organization and the individual does</p> <p>How does Acas develop its support proposition?</p>

	d. What perception do callers have of Acas?	How well equipped are advisors? Creating a bigger picture of what intervention may be
5.	How are you affected by the interactions you have with callers? a. What emotions in you do the conversations generate? b. How do the conversations help you do your job better? c. What role do you feel you have played after a call? d. What concerns you about these calls? e. What job satisfaction do you get from these interactions?	What discourses develop as a consequence of the interaction? How do experience and multiple discourses develop the intervention role? What sensations and emotions do employees feel? How are employees equipped to deal with interventionist strategies?
6.	What do you think happens to callers after they have called? a. What do they do? b. How can they call you back? c. How much better can they deal with the situation? d. What avenues may they pursue? e. What tools would you have provided to help them overcome?	Understand the reality they create out of the advice they have offered? What benefit do they see as the end product of their advice? How well can callers deal with the situation based on the advice given? How do they perceive the "way forward" after the advice is given?
7.	Based on your experience at Acas, what advice would you offer? a. To victims? b. To bullies? c. To the government and law makers d. To Acas e. To me	Understand the reality they have created Understand the discourse and how that has come to be Understand the differing advice and comment offered to differing actors
8.	Is there anything else you would like to add?	

5. Questions for interviews with managers and policy makers

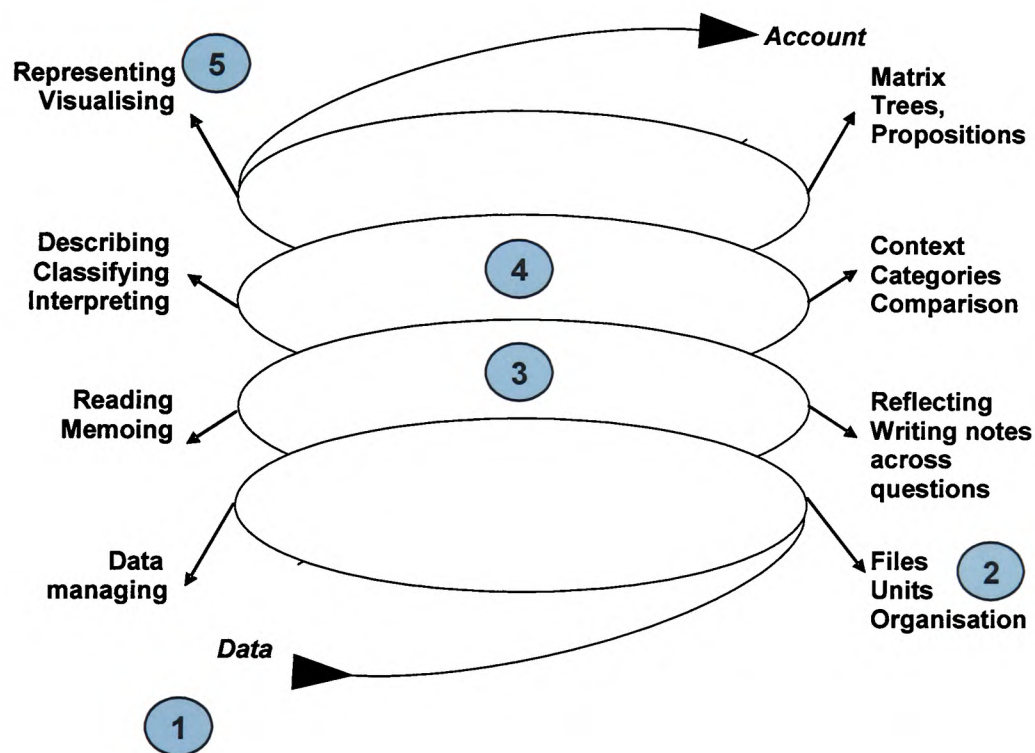
No	Question	Area of interest for research
1.	<p>Through your work at Acas, what does workplace bullying mean to you?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Why do you think this? What has influenced you in thinking this? What characterizes workplace bullying in your experience? How do you gauge whether someone has been bullied? What if you haven't received calls of this nature but might? 	<p>Definitions of bullying</p> <p>Personal perceptions</p> <p>Realities created by individuals around bullying</p> <p>How did they build their definition</p> <p>Influencing factors in drawing their own conclusions</p> <p>How they apply the definitions they have created in determining if a caller is being bullied</p>
2.	<p>Why do people who claim to be bullied call Acas?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What might they get from Acas that others are not providing? Where else might they go? How have they reached a decision to call Acas? 	<p>Their interpretation of the victims' position and the victims' discourses</p> <p>Their interpretation of the role they will play in the ensuing discourse</p> <p>How they have come to form this opinion being detached from the front line</p> <p>Their perception of the wider discourses that surround the specific episode and wider phenomenon</p>
3.	<p>What role do you play in leading the teams/setting policy regarding bullying</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What leadership is appropriate? What is important to the people taking the calls? How do you formulate policy? What processes do you have to maximize the benefit of intervention? 	<p>What discourses emerge in policy making?</p> <p>What roles do actors play?</p> <p>How are these roles created?</p> <p>What is the agenda?</p>

4.	<p>What role does Acas play in supporting victims of bullying?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What do you feel Acas is providing here? How constructive is the role that Acas provides? Why does Acas provide this service? What perception do employees have of this service? What perception do callers have of this service? 	<p>Establish if a difference is perceived between what the organization and the individual does</p> <p>How does Acas develop its support proposition?</p> <p>How well informed are managers and policy makers?</p> <p>Where does their knowledge come from?</p> <p>Creating a bigger picture of what intervention may be</p>
5.	<p>How are you affected by this service?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How has it affected your workload? How has it affected your views on bullying? What role do you feel you personally play? What concerns you about Acas' role in workplace bullying? How influential is bullying in your role? 	<p>What discourses develop as a consequence of the policy?</p> <p>How does leadership and policy develop the intervention strategy?</p> <p>What sensations and emotions do employees feel?</p> <p>How are employees equipped to develop interventionist strategies?</p>
6.	<p>How effective do you think this service is?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do you know? What is the future of this service? How/why should policy evolve in this service? What is needed to improve support from Acas for victims? 	<p>Understand the reality they create out of the advice they have offered?</p> <p>What benefit do they see as the end product of their advice?</p> <p>How do policy makers/leaders shape the future of the service?</p> <p>How do they perceive the "way forward" for intervention?</p>
7.	<p>Based on your experience at Acas, what advice would you offer?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To victims? To bullies? To the government and law makers To Acas 	<p>Understand the reality they have created</p> <p>Understand the discourse and how that has come to be</p> <p>Understand the differing advice and comment offered to differing actors</p>

		j. To me	
8.	Is there anything else you would like to add?		

Appendix C: Data Analysis Example

Appendix C offers an example of the process of transcript analysis for one particular response dataset. The analysis of the transcripts was broadly based on Cresswell's (2007) data analysis spiral illustrated below. This appendix comments in the first person. This is because it is not only an analysis of the process, but a reflection of the process I adopted given the unique circumstances of this research exercise. The numbers labelled on the diagram are explained in this appendix. The explanations relate to the original transcript.



I will take one example interview and explain how the three central themes in the results have emerged. The three central themes were established through setting out the aims of this thesis, structuring the interview questions and analysing the responses from the participants and are as follows:

- Definitions of workplace bullying
- Contextualising workplace bullying
- Impact of interventions in workplace bullying

The example interview used was 41 minutes in duration and the transcript consists of 5476 words.

Point 1: Data Collection

I believe the analysis begins during the data collection. For example, I was conscious in noting the conditions in which the interview took place, paying attention to the office environment prior to commencing the interview to assess if the participant was under pressure or close to finishing work for the day for example. Factors such as these examples may affect the interview process. The staff in each office were made aware of my visit and the reason for it. Fortunately, due to operational workload, the participants were not confirmed until literally until minutes before the interview started. I was also conscious that my questioning did as little as possible to lead the participant towards a particular agenda or answer. Whilst this follows traditional qualitative method conventions, I was conscious that leading questions could make the analysis somewhat limited in credibility if my positioning had led the participant to reply in a particular way.

Point 2: Files, Units, and Organisation

The original ordering and filing of interview data was conducted following the initial reading of it. From this reading, I was able to draw out core themes that had become evident in the responses and identify parts of the transcript that helped address the main aim of the thesis and research question. As the reading progressed, a filing convention materialised, providing an initial form of organisation for the data. This filing dealt mainly with the core themes, such as the definition of workplace bullying; in effect a first pass of making sense of the data.

I did not have a pre-conceived approach to the how the filing should occur. This may have been a weakness in hindsight as it proved a hugely time consuming exercise to analyse the data in the later stages. I believe however that an absence of pre-judging the way the filing would emerge could be a strength in that the replies 'spoke for themselves', rather than me looking for messages I wanted to find. The filing comprised of differing coloured sticky notes to identify themes that would need to be pursued. Additionally,

legends were used on the transcript document to pinpoint areas of text that were perceived to be important in addressing the aims of the thesis.

Point 3: Reading/Memoing and Reflecting/Writing notes

Having read the responses twice and reflected on the notes initially made in order to review my original rationale behind them, I built a framework that would contain the excerpts from the interviews that potentially could be used in the thesis. Each interview had its own framework. The framework consisted of a table comprising the transcript in the left column and my notes in the right column. In my notes, I began to identify and categorise secondary themes within the data. For example, using the definition of workplace bullying as a core theme, a secondary theme could be who is making that definition. I tried to maintain a level of consistency with all the interview frameworks such that some ordering of the themes that emerged could be achieved. This was to give the reflection and memoing more structure to understand my thought process during the later stages of analysis, which it transpired would be many months later.

In order to give the framework some preliminary meaning, I further examined closely relevant pieces of text, which could be used to understand the role of the helpline advisor and therefore address the aims of the thesis. I used inserted memos as a prompt to reflect on the meaning the results had provided. Despite having distilled the whole transcripts, leaving only excerpts from the interviews, this part of the analysis process resulted in a lengthy document for each interview requiring further analysis.

Point 4: Describing/Classifying/Interpreting and Context/Categories/Comparison

In order to provide a dataset that was focused on the specific aims of the thesis and that the reader can assimilate, I reviewed each interview's excerpts set within the framework document described above, looking for contextualisation in the responses that would help explain and understand Acas' role, rather than just descriptive narrative and what I term 'in fill', which could be described as the language that links the rich narrative in the responses. This involved reviewing each excerpt to examine not only what the respondent was saying, but from what perspective, and in what context it was being said. I categorised this as a tertiary theme in the analysis. This third level consists of

understanding and further distilling each excerpt to focus on specific circumstances the participant was referring to at the time when the comments had been made. Analysing the data in this way resulted in a greater volume of excerpts, but usually of a shorter length with specific areas of focus.

The challenge I faced in this aspect of the analysis was to provide a level of focus that drew out the text's richness of meaning to aid the reader's understanding, but also to ensure that the text included in the thesis retained its context and perspective. If the text is too long, then the value, meaning and purpose of inclusion may be diluted. A single sentence in isolation, however, may have no context or perspective, resulting in what could be a meaningless statement in the thesis.

Point 5: Representing/Visualising

The purpose of this final element of the data analysis was for me to be able to weave together the excerpts, context and perspective that had been achieved in the previous stages of analysis to form a narrative that was comprehensive, focused and contextualised to address the aims of the thesis. I did not necessarily see this as analysis. Rather, my opinion is that this stage presents me with the opportunity to tell my reader about my findings. The important aspect to this stage therefore, was being able to represent the data in a way that the reader would find engaging and meaningful. One could describe this stage of the analysis as 'telling the story', although this terminology may be misunderstood in the context of doctoral research rigour. I do believe that it is acceptable, however, to provide meaning and understanding in a way that aligns with the philosophical traditions in which the thesis is offered. In this case, therefore, representing the reality of the research participants' opinions in the way that they perceive the situation is appropriate.

Examples of Excerpts used in the Thesis.

This example excerpt relates to the part of the interview discussing the definition of workplace bullying. Prior to the transcript shown below, the participant had replied to the initial question about defining workplace bullying, but had responded in a way that offered little meaning to this question.

The highlighted text depicts what has been used in this thesis. In this excerpt, the response contained a core theme regarding the definition of workplace bullying. During Points 2 and 3 of the data spiral process outlined above, I gathered many excerpts that related to definition. During Point 4 of the analysis, the contextualisation of the excerpts revealed differing aspects of the participants' opinions. In this case, two aspects were apparent; the context of the definition offered and the value of a definition.

Both aspects provided a valuable insight into the definitional debate in this thesis. In considering Point 5 of the analysis, and in my opinion the presentation of the data, two parts of the data's 'story' were woven into the results discussion. These were who benefited from a definition to workplace bullying and how personal experiences, in this case, considering time, could potentially affect the way people define workplace bullying.

PW Thanks. So just to go back to the way you define workplace bullying, can you tell me a little more about that please?

P5 Oh yeah, sorry, I went off on one there. I'd still say that it's not something that's for me to define, really. Well, it could mean a wide variety of different things. I guess there's still the old fashioned physical abuse, there's violent outbursts towards people. Of course an awful lot of it can be combined with discrimination. More common now, I think as people begin to understand, I guess the more subtle bullying, erm, person who constantly interrupts and prevents you from speaking, the ostracising of individuals, um, and... which in itself, you know, has almost become unacceptable from what I can gather in the fact sheets and all that. There is a workplace bullying category of its own now which is outside, you know, like I guess the old fashioned terms, you know, physical and violent behaviour. For me though, defining workplace bullying is more about me than the person ringing in. I don't think they want me to define anything for them, but erm, well, I suppose it's useful if I have an opinion, like well a definition for me. That doesn't make much sense sorry. What I am trying to say is that as an

advisor I probably need to know what it is, but there's not much point in me telling them that. Cos' if I did, that would be seen as bias as I would be telling them what was happening to them and that's not allowed. We must always be neutral. You've probably been told that already.

This second excerpt from the example interview surrounds the expectations of the caller. The core theme that this relates to is impacts of the intervention. Points 2 and 3 of analysis showed that the impacts discussions were the most diverse parts of the interviews. This made framing the responses more difficult because the range of replies differed more so than in the other core themes. This meant that the secondary and tertiary themes often became solitary excerpts, resulting in many isolated texts which required meaning and context. Whilst this in itself provides insight and understanding, it also means that the focus and structuring of the responses to accommodate the confines of the thesis, in terms of such restrictions as word count, becomes significantly more challenging.

I therefore approached Points 4 and 5 looking for themes that aided the aims of the thesis and potential future research. For example, there seemed to be little purpose served in repeatedly discussing the point that many advisors did not have an opinion on the impact of the intervention. Whilst such responses are in themselves results, and indeed useful for Acas, they have limited use in developing the research debate from both a practical or academic perspective.

This excerpt contains core, secondary and tertiary themes. First, the core theme of impact is evident in what the caller is looking for when they contact Acas. Second, the way that this participant has contextualised the needs of the caller is relatively explicit and very clear as they demonstrate an awareness of their understanding of the situation they are explaining. The secondary theme builds in this example by offering a solution to the contextualised comment that the participant has made by suggesting that counselling is one expectation that may be going unaddressed, highlighting what may be a significant shortfall in meeting callers' needs. Third, the participant raising the potential need for counselling helps Point 5 of the analysis. This representation of the results enabled me to introduce into the results the comments made around the additional expectations that callers may have and how these needs may be resolved. This had two benefits. First, it

helped to contrast the possible shortcomings of the intervention and second provided a catalyst for the discussion, which I believe includes offering areas for future research.

PW What do callers want from you when you speak to them?

P5 I think sometimes that they like to talk it through. They just want a sounding board really and I think then they can feel better at the end of it because it's a release for them almost to go through their story. Usually, I find it's because they've got no one to speak to who understands what they're going through. I suppose we don't really either. I think it's as if they want counselling or something else from us. But that's not really something we can do. Counselling isn't a single call to us, it's like a whole process with visits and progress, erm, like erm therapy I suppose. You could never call us therapists. I'm not saying its what maybe someone should be doing who we could refer them to, but over the phone? And because we are a free service, some people will expect to get this from us. I think its why there's so much stress sick time nowadays 'cos people just go their doctor and get signed off. Then it all starts again when they go back. All we can do is listen to their story and just point them in the right direction. That's all we can do.

Summary

This purpose of this brief explanation using one interview example has been to explain the process adopted in collecting, analysing and presenting the qualitative data used in this thesis. The objectives of the explanation have been to demonstrate how the data spiral method was used in the process and, in some small way, represent the benefits and challenges of the approach.

Appendix C has shown that representing qualitative data is a complex process where the aims of the research have to be focused upon and kept at bay at the same time to ensure that the thesis constantly and simultaneously maintains its purpose and academic rigour.